

“DIVERSE BLOODS”:
WHITE WOMANHOOD AND INTERRACIAL KINSHIP IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY
AMERICAN LITERATURES

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

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August 2012

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“‘Diverse Bloods’: White Womanhood and Interracial Kinship in Nineteenth-Century American Literatures,” demonstrates how interracial kinship refigures the meanings of whiteness and womanhood in the nineteenth century. The figure of the white woman is often central to discourses of race and racism in frontier romances, abolitionist literature, and literatures of race, reunion, and Reconstruction. I argue that white women’s relations to non-whites, in adoption or marriage to non-white people, or bearing children who are not understood to be white like themselves, challenges conventional rhetorics of white womanhood in the texts I discuss. Focusing on the centrality of interracial kinship relations prevents characters from being read in line with dominant ideas of white womanhood, such as Amy Kaplan’s notion of white women’s participation in “Manifest Domesticity” or Linda Kerber’s model of “Republican Motherhood.” Exposing how this raced and gendered icon is constructed by her positioning against white and non-white kin, literary narratives of white women’s interracial kinship relations work to shape discourses of domesticity, heterosexuality, nationalism, abolitionism, and racial uplift. Ultimately, “Diverse Bloods” shows how nineteenth-century texts shifted the expectations of white women’s kinship towards a model of womanhood able to incorporate structures of national multiracial family.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Brigitte Nicole Fielder was born and raised in Syracuse, New York. She attended Hartwick College, majoring in Philosophy and Religious Studies and minoring in music, graduating *summa cum laude* and with College Honors and departmental distinction in 2000. She greatly values her liberal arts education. Brigitte earned a Master's degree in Theological and Religious Studies from Drew University in 2003 and a Master's degree in English from Syracuse University in 2007. During her early graduate studies, she worked as a barista, an elementary Catholic school teacher, a bookseller, a manager, and an administrative assistant. She prefers teaching. While a graduate student in English at Cornell University, she won the Harry Falkenau Graduate Teaching Fellowship in 2009/10 and the Martin Sampson Teaching Award in 2012. During her time at Cornell Brigitte also worked as a graduate assistant to the Melon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Program and taught at Auburn Correctional Facility as part of the Cornell Prison Education Program. She received a Jay and Deborah Last Fellowship in American Visual Culture from the American Antiquarian Society in 2011 and an Animals & Society Institute/Wesleyan Animal Studies, Human-Animal Studies Fellowship at Wesleyan University in 2012 for work on her new project, *Animal Humanism*.

In loving dedication to my parents,

Sue Ann Fielder and Stephan Fielder

for their consistent love and support of my studies

and to my grandmothers,

Thelma Rhoda Degon and Ann Summerford Fielder

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My committee members, Shirley Samuels, Eric Cheyfitz, and Grant Farred, have been essential to this project's development. Coursework with them has been formative for my academic development, and conversations with each of them has helped me to develop this project through its many stages. Shirley Samuels, among other things, helped me to first realize that my project was, indeed, about kinship. Her commitment to American women writers, in particular, has set an example for work that her many graduate students will surely continue. Eric Cheyfitz has provided frank critique of my work when I needed it, and encouragement that endured despite his realistic attention to current crises of academia. Grant Farred has been simultaneously one of the most rigorous and one of the most supportive advisers I have known.

Archival research for this dissertation was supported by Cornell University American Studies Program Dissertation Research Grants in 2009, 2011, and 2012, and a Society for the Humanities Graduate Travel Research Grant in 2010, for visits to the American Antiquarian Society, the Buffalo Historical Society, and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Many thanks, in particular, to Paul Erickson and the helpful librarians at the American Antiquarian Society – especially Diann Benti, Andrew Bourque, Tracey Kry, and Elizabeth Pope – for their assistance during my many visits there. Time to write was facilitated by Cornell University's Harry Falkenau Graduate Teaching Fellowship in 2009/10 and a Cornell University Provost's Diversity Fellowship in 2011/12. During both fellowships I also had the opportunity to plan and teach courses on topics related to my dissertation research.

A Dissertation Writing Group Grant from the Cornell University Society for the Humanities in 2009/10 allowed me to workshop chapters in conversation with other graduate

students working on nineteenth-century American Studies: Dianne Cappiello, Melissa Gnaidek, Toni Wall Jaudon, Daegan Miller, and Jonathan Senchyne. The group's helpful discussions of my chapters helped me to rethink their arguments, as well as the larger framing of the dissertation. Portions of chapters were also discussed with attendees of the English Department Roundtable series at Cornell. Many thanks to Giffen Maupin, especially, for the work she did to plan this series in those years, and for her helpful and encouraging comments. The Futures of American Studies Institute has been an extremely productive space for my work during the last three summers of my graduate studies. Donald Pease's combination of collegiality and rigor has facilitated my academic development during my attendance there. Chapters one and two have benefitted greatly from discussions with Don, Eric Lott, and my fellow Futures seminarians, and Elizabeth Maddock Dillon's comments on my first chapter helped me to re-think its structure.

When I made an important academic shift from Philosophy of Religion to Literature, I was grateful to the professors who took seriously a woman with a full-time job and degrees in another field. Dymphna Callaghan, Steven Cohan, Gregg Lambert, Amy Schrager Lang, Linda Shires, Adam Sitze, Harvey Teres, and Monika Siebert made it possible for me to begin my Master's degree in English using my tuition credits as an employee of Syracuse University, and made me feel no less a member of that department as a result. My time as a Master's student at Syracuse also first introduced me to a community of English literary studies. Rinku Chatterjee, Rachel Collins, Michael Dwyer, Sarah Etlinger, Gina Liotta, Corinne Martin, Nathaniel Mills, Jonathan Senchyne, Tristan Sipley, and Cristina Stasia listened to many of my early conference papers at the English Graduate Organization's "Negotiations" series, and I've benefitted greatly from sharing in their academic discussions. Their friendship and encouragement has been an immense support as I've completed my graduate studies.

Several established people in my field make a habit of welcoming into the profession graduate students to whom they have no institutional obligations by generously taking an interest in their work, and by taking them seriously at lectures, conferences, and reading groups. These people, who have made me happy to join the academic profession, include Hester Blum, Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, Anna Mae Duane, Sari Edelstein, Jonathan Beecher Field, Susan Gillman, Daniel Hack, Holly Jackson, Cindi Katz, Eric Lott, Philip Nel, Meredith McGill, Donald Pease, Martha Schoolman, Jordan Stein, and Elisa Tamarkin.

Eric Cheyfitz first gave me the opportunity to work as a graduate assistant to the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Program in 2009. Working with students who intended to pursue graduate degrees allowed me to read the work of and help to advise more advanced students than those in my own classes. Many thanks to the MMUF fellows for their excellent work and conversations, and to Margo Crawford, Maria Davidis, and Myra Sabir, whose work with the program made mine a joy to perform. Working as Grant Farred's research assistant for most of my time at Cornell has taught me much about scholarship, journal publishing, and sport.

Other members of the Cornell community have been meaningful influences in various capacities, especially Richard Boyd, Rick Canfield, Robin Davisson, Cindy Hazan, Mary Katzenstein, Barbara Koslowski, Bruce Levitt, Judy Levitt, and Janet Shortall. I am grateful to have met these excellent people. Daphna Ram has provided company for either work or relaxation, as each were needed, and has been a great friend.

During my dissertation writing fellowship year, I had the opportunity to teach two World Literature courses to incarcerated men at Auburn Correctional Facility. Teaching these hardworking college students was an invaluable experience, and one that continuously reminded me why I want to teach literature. Some of these students were awarded well-deserved

Associates Degrees the year I completed my Doctoral degree. I wish them the best. The incarcerated men of the Phoenix Players Theatre Group and the Veterans Association “Crochet Squad” have been inspirational in their desire to make a difference in their own lives and in others’.

The Cornell University Nineteenth-Century American Reading Group has been formative for my academic development. Its members are enthusiastically dedicated to bringing outstanding lecturers to campus, organizing our annual collaborative conference with the Victorian Reading Group, and attending lively monthly meetings at which we’ve discussed a wide array of canonical and lesser-known texts. I am grateful to Nolan Bennett, Alex Black, Jill Spivey Cadell, Hilary Emmett, Sarah Ensor, Melissa Gniadek, Kamila Janiszewska, Toni Wall Jaudon, Michael Jonik, Daegan Miller, Dan Radus, Jonathan Senchyne, and Xine Yao for academic collaborations and conversations that I hope will continue throughout our careers.

While writing this dissertation, I’ve learned much from other graduate students in Cornell’s English department. Alex Black, Owen Boynton, Katie Destiny Compton, Lily Cui, Ryan Dirks, Matthew Fellion, Ben McCormick, Shilo R. McGiff, Seth Perlow, Steve Pinkerton, Christine Suwendy, Sang Wu, and Brad Zukovic taught me that collegiality and solidarity are as important as the writing. Melissa Gniadek and Toni Wall Jaudon have been important readers and role models. Jill Spivey Cadell, Kamila Janiszewska, and Giffen Maupin have provided both scholarly feedback and essential breaks for yoga, tea, and wine, all of which have been important to my writing process. Alex Black has been an early reader of my work and a provider of great archival finds. Conversations with him have been essential to my thinking.

Some of my non-academic friends have been amazing supports throughout my graduate career, offering general life assistance and words of encouragement in the midst of their own

busy lives. For this, I give special thanks to Bethel Willingham, Victor Willingham, and Melissa Williams. Leonard Medico, Jr., Liz Myers, Jennifer Sampson, Luke Tremaine, Chad Shampine, and Grace Medico Young have also been important friends who, since high school, have taken seriously my academic endeavors.

The cats with whom I share my home, Mitsubishi, Inigo, Gavroche, Gemma, and Kitty, have often prevented me from working on this dissertation. And they've typed many a repeated, errant character into its pages. Nevertheless, their presence has been a happy distraction to my daily work, and for that I must thank them.

My parents, Sue Ann Fielder and Stephan Fielder, have always been the most important people in my life. My love of literature originated with the many books they read to me before I could read them myself. I cannot thank these hardworking people enough for everything they've done for the benefit of my education. Their consistent encouragement of each new academic endeavor has been a bastion of support against all other difficulties of the academic profession. I wrote this dissertation for them as much as I wrote it for myself.

Jonathan Senchyne's presence as a colleague and a partner have made writing this much easier than it might have been without him. He is my first and last reader, and our conversations are often where my thoughts on a text are first articulated. Jonathan has my thanks and my love.

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Introduction

“Diverse Bloods”

It is clear that no race can long endure without a commingling of its blood with that of other races. The condition of all human progress is miscegenation. The Anglo-Saxon should learn this in time for his own salvation. If we will not heed the demands of justice, let us, at least, respect the law of self-preservation. Providence has kindly placed on the American soil, for his own wise purposes, four millions of coloured people. They are our brothers, our sisters. By mingling with them we become powerful, prosperous, and progressive: by refusing to do so we become feeble, unhealthy, narrow-minded, unfit for the nobler offices of freedom, and certain of early decay.

David Goodman Croly and George Wakeman, *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and Negro*, from Chapter III, “The Blending of Diverse Bloods Essential to American Progress”

Louisa May Alcott’s most well-known story of interracial family and post-Civil War reunion is her Civil War Era tale originally published as “The Brothers,” (1863).¹ Alcott’s title emphasizes the mixed-race, formally-enslaved Robert’s biological relation to “Marster Ned,” his white, slaveholding half-brother. The narrative of interracial sibling-kinship frames civil war and racial conflict as familial matters, preparing readers for a new narrative of national reunion that is even more necessary because it also constitutes familial reconciliation. “The Brothers,” by framing relations of interracial kinship between Civil War soldiers, places the white military nurse, Faith Dane, in the position of mother to white, black, and racially-mixed “boys.” In this figuring of Faith, the “white” and “black” brothers need not be in competition for her love (and

¹ This story originally appeared in *Atlantic Monthly* 12, no 73 (November 1863) as “The Brothers” despite Alcott’s preference for the title “My Contraband.” The story was reprinted as “My Contraband; or the Brothers.” in *Hospital Sketches and Camp and Fireside Stories* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1869). For further discussion of the publication history of this story and the significance of the changing title, see Sarah Elbert’s *Louisa May Alcott on Race, Sex, and Slavery* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997), xli.

importantly, she is not in danger of rape, as Robert's wife was victimized), but mothers all her "boys" equally, standing as a surrogate mother to the nation.²

Importantly, this positioning of Faith Dane as universal mother forecloses the possibility of any of these "boys'" sexual relation to Faith. While Alcott's alternate title, "My Contraband" frames the story around the relation between Nurse Dane and Robert, the "contraband" soldier, "The Brothers," in its prioritization of the relation between the two men, directs attention away from the subject of Faith's interracial sexual desire. While Alcott's story ultimately refuses to pursue the possibility of Dane's participation in interracial sex, it nevertheless suggests its possibility, as Sarah Elbert and other readers of Alcott and race have suggested.³ Faith's positioning at the center of the story in Alcott's alternate title, "My Contraband," draws attention to this possibility for interracial sexual desire in the story. Faith's desire is not restrained because of any general inclination against "amalgamation," but is thwarted more specifically by her preoccupation with Robert's status as a previously-enslaved person.

By refusing to explicitly denounce "amalgamation," its possibility is not entirely foreclosed, other than through the shift toward reading Faith Dane as maternal. In the moment at which Faith touches Robert and "in an instant the man vanished and the slave appeared," the

² Throughout this dissertation, I use terms such as "white," "black," "Indian," and "mixed-race" or "racially-mixed" to designate the racial categories of the characters I discuss, where this is essential to understanding my arguments about race. I sometimes employ "scare quotes" around these terms in order to draw attention to the problems of their conventional uses to convey assumedly- definite and biological racial categories. I wish to draw attention to this common usage as a metaphorical one – as adjectives that purport to denote physical appearance, but which actually suggest a complex set of assumptions about biological and social categories of race, racial genealogy, and racial dualism. I retain these terms because these are the terms used in the literary texts I discuss, and because they are legible terms for thinking about how race was understood in the nineteenth century. I also use them because they are so common to the literature and scholarship with which this dissertation is concerned, as even texts that outwardly challenge these racial categories cannot escape the limitations of the language we (still) use to talk about race in the United States. Although sometimes these quotation marks will serve as a distracting reminder of the various problems of these content-laden terms, at other times they drop out, for mere ease of conversation. Even where I do not use quotation marks, however, I intend to refer to literary or national tropes of whiteness and blackness (which are admittedly content-laden) rather than to actual qualifications of race that I would rather apply to either literary characters or historical figures.

³ Elbert, *Louisa May Alcott on Race*, xli.

construction of difference in legal personhood rather than racialized biology demands that Faith's further affections are only maternal in nature.⁴ As Sarah Elbert notes, "Alcott thus insists that it is the man, tragically conscious of social boundaries and the consequences of crossing them, who forces Faith Dane to see her whiteness. Faith's sexual attraction to the 'man' is immediately disarmed by his performance as the 'slave,' and she resumes her own mask of comforting mother and, not incidentally, her dominance."⁵ However, this familial orientation of Faith as mother does not simply trump racial and gender hierarchies in the story, but only thinly veils them. Nor does this prioritization of motherhood evacuate the story's subtext of interracial sexual relations.

Redirecting the possibility of Faith's interracial sexual desire in "My Contraband" toward her motherly relation to both white and black "boys" in "The Brothers" importantly reinscribes some of the racial hierarchy of enslavement. Viewing Faith as a suitable mother (but not as a suitable lover) retains the hierarchy of race relations between black men and white women. As mother, Faith Dane retains a position of power and is regarded as a caregiver, rather than an equal. This relation of white motherhood to black children is rendered visible in an illustration of Tribulation Periwinkle nursing Baby Africa, from Alcott's 1869 collection, *Hospital Sketches, and Camp and Fireside Stories*. (See Figure 1)

Regarding the white mother in a position of stewardship to the black nation shows a simple re-gendering of the paternalism inherent in pro-slavery arguments, which often claimed that whites were merely caregivers to black people who could not be expected to care for themselves outside the system of plantation slavery. Like Nurse Periwinkle, Faith Dane is similarly positioned as a white mother to the black nation, as black people are understood as

⁴ Louisa May Alcott, *Hospital Sketches, and Camp and Fireside Stories* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1869), 172.

⁵ Elbert, *Louisa May Alcott on Race*, xlii.

perpetual children in Alcott's story. The presence of the black woman in the background of the illustration also signifies her displacement. If Nurse Periwinkle, a white woman, must tend to "Baby Africa," the implication is that black mothers are somehow failing, either through their own fault (as Daniel P. Moynihan would later blame black mothers for the economic condition of black families) or through the structural inequalities that denied most black women access to the same educational and economic privileges that facilitated traditional models of white motherhood.



Figure 1: Nurse Tribulation Periwinkle holding Baby Africa
Louisa May Alcott, *Hospital Sketches and Camp Fireside Stories* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1869)

"One hand stirred gruel for sick America, and the other hugged baby Africa."

Another potential reading of the figure of the white woman exists, however, if we take serious the possibility of Nurse Periwinkle's kinship to Baby Africa or Faith Dane's mothering of black "boys." I want here to suggest a more radical reading of white mothering of black children than what is usually understood by the black mother's displacement or absence. Reading Faith Dane as a potential mother to black "boys" is provocative when one considers this relation as biological, in the possibility of bearing her own black children. If Faith Dane and Nurse Periwinkle are understood as capable of having biological relations to black children, rather than as surrogate or figurative mothers only, the prospect of interracial kinship suggests new readings and potentialities for white motherhood.

When the suggestion of biological motherhood is taken seriously, the image of Nurse Periwinkle can be read as returning to the possibility of sexual desire between Faith Dane and Robert. Here we might re-read Robert's assumption of Faith's surname, either as a lover in a reverse of gendered marital name-exchange or as a child who has inherited it, in light of this possibility for interracial kinship. Putting aside the more obvious problem of figuring power relations between the white woman and the black man in this story, we are left with the possibility of racial intermixture. In this case, white women's desire for racial Others leads logically to the possibility for other interracial kinship relations, both in the relation of sexual kinship with non-white men in marriage or other domestic relations, and in relations of interracial motherhood. The fact that interracial sexual desire can lead to the literal embodiment of racial mixture (i.e., the production of racially-mixed bodies) places the white woman involved in interracial sexual relations in a racially-precarious position. While white women have often been read as key protectors and preservers of whiteness, their interracial sexual encounters may result in the (re)production of the racial Other: the children white women bear from such

encounters will not be designated as “white” like themselves.⁶ When read in this light, the suggestion of interracial sexual relations in “My Contraband” also hints at the possibility of Nurse Dane’s bearing racially-mixed children like Robert. Taking the possibility of interracial kinship seriously, we arrive at another reading of Nurse Periwinkle and Baby Africa: a reading of familial relations, rather than of national/racial stewardship or paternalism.

My aim here is to re-think the possibilities of kinship in this illustration and Alcott’s Civil War story in order to emphasize a particular version of white womanhood that does not foreclose her involvement in interracial kinship relations. If we think beyond these usual understandings of kinship as a metaphor for understanding either the nation or assumptions of racial dependency and stewardship, we can better understand depictions of white women who are at the center of interracial kinship relations – relations of adoption, potentially procreative sexual relations, or relations of motherhood. “‘Diverse Bloods’: White Womanhood and Interracial Kinship in Nineteenth-Century American Literatures” is a study of texts that represent white women both at the center of and as key figures in narratives of interracial kinship.

Demonstrating how interracial kinship refigures the meanings of whiteness and womanhood in the nineteenth century, this dissertation demonstrates how the figure of the white woman is often central to discourses not only of race and racism, but also of interracial kinship relations, in frontier romances, abolitionist literature, “anti-amalgamation” literature, and literatures of race, reunion, and Reconstruction. White women’s relations to non-white or racially mixed people in adoption or marriage, or bearing children who are not understood to be white like themselves, challenges conventional rhetorics of white womanhood in the texts I

⁶Barbara J. Fields cites the concept of “interracial” motherhood in her discussion of the absurdity of biologically-construed race, referring to “the well-known anomaly of American racial convention that considers a white woman capable of giving birth to a black child but denies that a black woman can give birth to a white child.” See “Ideology and Race in American History” in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction* Ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 149.

discuss. Focusing on the centrality of interracial kinship relations prevents characters from being read in line with dominant ideas of white womanhood in which white women are figured only as preservers and reproducers of whiteness, rather than as figures able to conceive of themselves as members of multiracial families.

The word “kin” denotes both “family” and “race,” signifying “blood relation” as the defining characteristic of both categories. The connection between kinship recognition and racial identification is therefore clear. However, when the bounds of biological kinship cross imagined bounds of race, or when the kinship relation is behaviorally- rather than biologically-defined, these connections between kin and race become less clear: assumptions about racial definition often depend upon the articulation of race *despite* biological kinship ties, while literatures that highlight racial complexity often demand that kinship ties be acknowledged exclusively along the lines of racial identification. My use of the word “kinship” seeks to encompass a spectrum of relationships, both biological and behavioral, as the different texts I discuss may have it.

Just as notions of biological race or imagined quanta of “white,” “black,” or “Indian” “blood” are complicated by interracial kinship, representations of white womanhood are re-constructed through these relations. Attention to racialized kinship poses new possibilities for practices of reading the white woman, as interracial kinship challenges ideologies of biological, legal, or visually-identifiable race predominant in popular nineteenth-century literary genres. De-prioritizing biological paradigms and normative ideologies of race, my project extends beyond models of white womanhood to explore the intersections of African-American and Native American identities with whiteness as a means for theorizing how mixed- or ambiguously-raced characters function in literary and cultural texts.

“Diverse Bloods” focuses on how race and gender are constructed in nineteenth-century depictions of white women’s interracial marriage and adoption, in presentations of racialized maternity, and in the acknowledgement and rejection of biological kinship ties in racial anti-passing narratives. Because the various iterations of kinship relations I discuss contradict popular assumptions about racial difference, they collapse simplified tropes of “white womanhood,” revealing the category as constructed, just as kinship might be understood to extend beyond literal biological relatedness. As construction, the “white woman” is not a finite category of identification in the texts I discuss, but a role that characters might perform to varying degrees, or a literary, national, and cultural trope against which they, as characters, are read.

The construction of white womanhood has been essential to American discourses of race and racism, evidenced in places such as Amy Kaplan’s presentation of white women expelling “the foreign within” the domestic spaces of the home and the nation in “Manifest Domesticity,” and Linda Kerber’s model of a decidedly white “Republican Mother,” who reproduces whiteness by producing her sons as white, male citizens. The function of the “white woman” in nineteenth-century American literature and culture has clear implications, then, for an emerging American nation in which race is a significant point of national legal and social discourse and contention. American literary models of white womanhood have been associated with popular genres such as the captivity narrative and the sentimental novel, through which notions of white feminine beauty, racial and sexual purity, and middle-class domesticity come to signify national racial discourse.

While writers such as Vron Ware have given extensive attention to the construction of white womanhood and its importance for Western notions of race and racism in the British Empire, Amy Kaplan argues that at the crux of the connection between the domestic and the

national is the (white) American woman, whose domestic sphere is a microcosm of the nation. Similarly, June Namias locates the popularity of the captivity narrative within this ideology of white womanhood as an original literary site of American national purity and Shirley Samuels discusses the white woman's centrality to the relationship between the family and the state in the early Republic. My own readings deal with representations of women who complicate and usurp tropes of white womanhood even as their narratives draw upon the figure of the white woman as a national literary and cultural trope. Like Samuels, I regard the white woman's participation in structures of kinship as central to her importance for notions of political and national identity. With previous attention to the white woman as national and literary cultural trope in mind, I look to re-think the figure of the white woman with regard to interracial kinship. The texts I discuss here draws heavily upon the trope of the white woman. They do so, however, not to reinforce but to challenge the imagined figure of the "white woman," to claim, disavow, or re-work its rhetoric in their own representations of American femininity.

I therefore focus on the figure of the "white woman" as a recurring trope, visible to varying degrees in the literature I discuss, rather than a viable category of identification for its characters, authors, or potential readers. I do not attempt to broadly represent the category "white women," but focus on literary figures that do not fall neatly into the ideological category of white womanhood, but occupy its margins by virtue of their participation in structures of interracial kinship. In light of this, my project interrogates the category "white women," itself; I do not aim to categorize literary or historical figures by any degree to which they may or may not resemble an ideal trope, but instead examine their rhetorical uses of the "white woman" as a literary and cultural national figure. I explore the uses of this figure in my focus on literary representations of women whose identification as "white women" shifts or changes as they are

racially marked by the various events of their respective narratives or women who are racially-mixed or ambiguously-identified, and therefore do not fit neatly into the category of “white womanhood” even as their narratives draw upon this literary trope.

Writers, such as Eve Allegra Raimon, who have discussed mixed- or ambiguously-raced figures as the “tragic mulatta” trope often emphasize interracial figures as liminal, locating them between two (or more) racial extremes that don’t escape essentialization. This approach to hybridity, though acknowledging the social construction of race, is nevertheless dependent upon biological concepts of racialization. I interrogate these biological assumptions about race in my discussion of the assumptions necessary for both racial performance and kinship that traditionally prioritize essentialist notions of race and biological-relation. It is my aim to de-prioritize notions of biological kinship in light of the recognized, enacted, or performed kinship relations that take place in adoption, the mother/mammy relation, and sexual-kinship or marriage, opening up the idea of performing white femininity beyond cues of visual appearance usually associated with “passing” narratives, or descriptions of “white slavery.” Further, I am interested both in figures who might be understood more conventionally as “biologically” white, and those who are racially mixed. In either case, notions of biological or visual “whiteness” is complicated and compromised by interracial kinship relations, revealing whiteness as neither simply biological nor visual, but as constructed.

While nineteenth-century discourses on race are often invested in illuminating theories of racial essentialism and discussions of race as biological difference, in which race is detectable, essential, and determinate, scholarly work on race in the American nineteenth-century is often invested in coupling this discourse of racial separatism with evidence of racial mixture. Elise Lemire examines the role of racial mixture in American history and literature in her work on

“miscegenation” while Martha Hodes and Peggy Pascoe treat the relationships between white women and black men and the history of American “anti-miscegenation” law, respectively. In another vein, Tavia Nyong’o’s recent work examines the figure of the racial hybrid as a vehicle for nineteenth- and twentieth- century nationalism. My own work seeks to take up these threads of discussion surrounding racial mixture, gender, and national formation by examining the construction of race through kinship relations that inflect upon understandings of popular cultural tropes, literary genre, and models of nationhood.

The national figure of the mother as a vehicle for reproducing the nation must be differently understood in the context of interracial-marriage, adoptive or surrogate motherhood, or interracial children. Kimberly Wallace-Sanders’ writing on the figure of the mammy, for example, illustrates how differently-constructed kinship relations force us to think more comprehensively about how black women participated in nineteenth-century nation-building. My treatment of racially-mixed or ambiguous literary figures examines their relationship to national rhetorics of race and gender in which they might either participate (as Harriet Beecher Stowe’s or William Wells Brown’s “whitewashed” mixed-race heroines are often read) or defy (as in the examples of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper’s Iola Leroy or Charles Chesnutt’s “New Negro Mother.”) “Diverse Bloods” emphasizes the ways in which these assumedly-marginal figures complicate the rhetoric of white womanhood at work in the texts I discuss. Reading the figure of the “white woman” from these marginal positions will provide a deeper understanding of both the complications and impossibilities embodied in this figure, as well as the racial theories characteristic of the nineteenth century, which are dependent, in part, upon constructions of the “white woman.”

The first chapter, “Mary Jemison’s Cabin: The “White Woman” of the Genesee and the Cultural Logic of Adoption” examines the position of adopted kinship from which Jemison’s relation to her Seneca family is narrated in James Seaver’s *Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* (1824). When read alongside contemporary literatures of white woman’s captivity in the frontier romances of James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), Lydia Maria Child’s *Hobomok* (1824) and Catherine Maria Sedgewick’s *Hope Leslie* (1826), the structures of kinship at work in Jemison’s narrative reveal more possibilities for “interracial” kinship than are available in the captivity narrative with which Jemison is most often associated. Jemison’s narrative refuses essentialist understandings of the terms “white” and “Indian,” rejecting logics of captivity in favor of those of adoption. Relations of “interracial” kinship are also apparent in the domestic spaces Jemison inhabits throughout her story, as her relation to non-whites suggests notions of kinship and fugitivity that work against the models of white republican motherhood central to both Seaver’s framing and most critical work on this text.

Focusing on the most anxiety-laden nineteenth-century trope of interracial kinship, chapters two and three examine the rhetoric by which antebellum discourses of interracial (hetero)sexual relations describe blackness as transferred from black men (who “have” race) to white women (who “receive” race.) Chapter two, “Blackface Desdemona; or, the White Woman ‘Begrimed,’” analyzes the appearance of Desdemona in nineteenth-century American minstrel productions of *Othello*. While Othello and Desdemona become iconic figures for discourses of racial mixture in the American nineteenth-century, more complex rhetorics of racial marking and desire are at play in blackface minstrel productions of *Othello*, in which even Desdemona is represented in blackface. I demonstrate how a white woman’s appearance on stage “begrimed

and black as mine own [Othello's] face" literalized cultural and political anxieties about the "transfer" of racial marking from black men to white women through interracial sex.

Chapter three, "'Almost...Eliza': Reading Mary King as Mixed-Race Heroine," discusses the proposed marriage of William Allen, the "Coloured Professor" of New York Central College, and Mary King, the white daughter of abolitionists, recounted in Allen's 1853 *The American Prejudice Against Color*. While newspaper accounts position King as the "damsel" at the center of white racial anxieties, abolitionist supporters of their marriage read her in the tradition of Eliza Harris, the mixed-race heroine of Stowe's recently-published *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Rethinking Mary King's function in Allen's narrative reframes the "white woman" according to different literary genres. These generic characterizations indicate how King's racialization becomes a literary practice.

Chapters four and five take up chapter three's concluding claim that interracial sexual kinship also implies the production of racially-mixed offspring. These chapters therefore focus on literary depictions of interracial motherhood. In my fourth chapter, "Mothers and Mammies: Reading Racialized Maternity," I discuss the parallel racial representations of motherhood and "mammyhood" in Charles Chesnutt's "Her Virginia Mammy" (1899) and Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894). Continuing chapter three's discussion of racialization as a practice of reading, I discuss how Chesnutt's and Twain's texts construct the image of the mixed-race mother, working against both notions of idealized white motherhood and the racist type of the black "mammy." The categories of "mother" and "mammy" intersect here, blurring kinship relations that usually determine racial identification and allegiance.

My fifth and final chapter, "Kinfullness: Thinking Interracial National Kinship, presents an alternative to Hortense Spiller's notion of the "kinlessness" of African Americans in

enslavement, in my concept of “kinfullness.” In my discussion of Frances Harper’s *Iola Leroy* (1892), I argue that kinship is not evacuated in Harper’s novel, but is instead filled with the excess content of enslavement, either in the inheritance of the legal “condition of the mother” or in an excess of white biological kin who must then be rejected by texts that prioritize kinship relations articulating African American racial affiliation. Taking up notions of desire and heterosexual futurity that I introduced in chapter two, I relate my discussion of *Iola Leroy* to texts such as Louisa May Alcott’s “M.L.” (1863) and Kate Chopin’s “Désirée’s Baby” (1893), which also defy prominent racist discourse that would foreclose interracial desire. In Alcott’s and Chopin’s stories, the “problem” of white women’s interracial desire is inseparable from her relation to a reproductive future of mixed-race children. Concluding with a brief discussion of Chesnut’s *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901), I read Chesnut’s “New Negro Mother” as a figure who both acknowledges interracial kinship relations, but resists national racial reconciliation.

My conclusion, “‘Diverse Bloods’: ‘White’ Womanhood and Interracial National Kinship,” points us to how the rhetoric of white womanhood comes to bear on antebellum and Reconstruction era narratives of racial mixture and national kinship. My examples here are the antiracist narratives of racial (re)union such as William Wells Brown’s *Clotel* (1853), and Lydia Maria Child’s *Romance of the Republic* (1867). These texts work against ideologies of white womanhood that necessitate her rejection of the racial “Other,” as in Linda Kerber’s model of “republican motherhood” or Amy Kaplan’s theory of “manifest domesticity.” Rather, Brown’s and Child’s heroines both embody and reproduce racial difference, indicating a shift towards a model of womanhood able to incorporate the Other into structures of national multiracial family.

Though literary scholarship often positions the middle-class, heterosexual white woman against a racial “other” who is located outside the sphere of the American national family, many nineteenth-century literary texts do not depend upon the white woman’s racial separatism, but on her ability to create interracial structures of kinship. In the texts I discuss here, women characters appear in interracial kinship relations that allow them to challenge familiar literary tropes of white womanhood. The dominant model and accompanying ideology of white womanhood – even in the presentation of racially-ambiguous or mixed-race characters – becomes an important component of varied narrative discourses of domesticity, heterosexuality, nationalism, abolitionism, and racial uplift. Literary genres such as the frontier romance, abolitionist literature, and literatures of race, reunion, and Reconstruction, include complex structures of kinship that re-figure their white women characters against the more normative models of white womanhood based on assumptions of biological, racialized kinship relations.

Exposing how this raced and gendered icon is constructed by her positioning against white and non-white kin, literary narratives of white women’s interracial kinship relations work to shape discourses of domesticity, heterosexuality, nationalism, abolitionism, and racial uplift. Ultimately, “Diverse Bloods” shows how nineteenth-century texts shifted the expectations of white women’s kinship towards a model of womanhood able to incorporate structures of national multiracial family. This project therefore examines the tropes of white womanhood at work texts in which models of white womanhood are prominently figured in interracial kinship relations.

Chapter One

Mary Jemison's Cabin:

The "White Woman" of the Genesee and the Cultural Logic of Adoption

"To him she was a white woman, and he knew stories of white women being taken by Indians."

Rayna M. Gangi, *Mary Jemison: White Woman of the Seneca: a novel* (1996)

". . . you yourself have done some strange things. You know what they say about you and that mute Negro, don't you?"

Deborah Larsen, *The White* (2002)

Separated from her husband, and with five small children to feed, in the autumn 1779 Mary Jemison hired herself out to harvest corn for two African American men living on Gardow Flats in Western New York, the land that was later to become Jemison's property. In her 1824 as-told-to narrative, she remembers, "I have laughed a thousand times to myself when I have thought of the good old negro, who hired me, who fearing that I should get taken or injured by the Indians, stood by me constantly when I was husking, with a loaded gun in his hand, in order to keep off the enemy, and thereby lost as much labor of his own as he received from me, by paying good wages."⁷ After General Sullivan's army, on orders from George Washington, had succeeded in burning Seneca corn and houses, killing their cattle and horses and destroying their fruit trees, it is clear to Jemison that "the enemy" is the white Continental Army, rather than the local Indians who both she and her racially-mixed children recognize as kin.⁸

More than an anecdotal event in Jemison's tale, the winter Jemison and her children spend in the cabin of these self-emancipated men is representative of how her narrative resists

⁷ James E. Seaver, *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, ed. June Namias (1824; reprint, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 105. Further references to *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

⁸ During the Revolutionary War, the Sullivan Expedition waged as an offensive attack against the Iroquois Confederacy. In Western New York, George Washington ordered Sullivan's army to carry out a scorched earth campaign, destroying Indian villages as part of a genocidal attack on the Iroquois tribes who had aligned themselves with the British.

conventional underpinnings of white womanhood, speaking to the ways Jemison does not conform to the models of white femininity and domesticity usually associated with literatures of the early republic. The irony of the above scene reminds us of both the perceived vulnerability of white women on the frontier and the actual vulnerability of Senecas such as Jemison and her children during the Revolution. But the irony of Jemison's laughter here is eclipsed by the further irony of her would-be-defenders: two self-emancipated "negro" men – rather unlikely protectors of white womanhood in American literatures of the 1820s. Taken in the entirety of its irony, this part of Jemison's story is more than just one example of the several ways she fails to function within the bounds of white womanhood, but reveals something more fundamental about the way whiteness itself is working throughout her narrative. While most scholarly discussions of Jemison have either ignored or given minimal attention to the autumn and winter she and her children spent with the two African American men who helped save them from starvation, attending to the significance of these events gives insight into the ways Jemison's tale reveals an identity generated by associations of kinship and domesticity that are dependent upon cultural or behavioral relationships, rather than biological ones.

On the surface, Mary Jemison's narrative of captivity, adoption, marriage and child-rearing presents a story of either "cross-racial" or "transcultural" kinship and domesticity. It is most often associated with the captivity narrative genre, and read as the story of a (biologically) white woman who "becomes" (culturally) Indian through her adoption into a Seneca community. Although Jemison continually reiterates her sense of belonging with her Indian family throughout the narrative, and is never "recovered" by her former Anglo community (other than through James E. Seaver's retelling her story for a presumably white audience),⁹ the assumedly-

⁹ Harriet S. Caswell gives an account of Jemison's religious recovery, however, in *Our Life Among the Iroquois Indians* (Boston: Congregational Sunday-School and Publishing Society, 1892), 56-58. Caswell recounts a visit

biological marker “white” persists in her story’s framing and in subsequent academic discussions of the text. Jemison’s amanuensis and the first editor of *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, James Seaver, as well as most subsequent depictions of Mary Jemison, paint “the White Woman of the Genesee” as a figure bifurcated by these conflicting biologically- and culturally-construed identities – a woman who may “become” Indian, but who never ceases to be “white.”¹⁰ (See Figures 2 and 3) However, Jemison tells a different story in the narrative, exposing the biological conception of whiteness as insufficient for identity-formation, and challenging assumptions that prioritize biological kinship relations.¹¹ It is through domestic relations of

made to Mary Jemison (“The White Woman”) and one of her daughters by Mrs. Wright, a missionary, in 1833. The narrative describes Jemison’s eagerness to speak with a Christian missionary and her retelling the story of her biological mother’s final instructions to always remember the Christian prayer she had taught her to repeat every day, and her guilt at eventually forgetting the words. Mrs. Wright then recites the Lord’s Prayer in English, and Jemison is overcome at the recollection. This response, followed by Mrs. Wright’s praying with Jemison, and reading to her from the gospel, is read as Jemison’s return to Christianity. The story of the encounter concludes, “we think she died in the cheering faith of the gospel, and not in the darkness of paganism” (58). Jemison’s supposed return to the Christianity of her white relatives in this scene stands in for the “recovery” to white society that Jemison’s narrative itself refuses. When read as an appendix to Seaver’s original account, its presence evidences a compulsion, of sorts, to read Jemison’s as a tale of captivity, even while the narrative itself resists this genre. This account is later incorporated into the second edition of Jemison’s Narrative, *De-he-wä-mis: or A Narrative of the Life of Mary Jemison: Otherwise Called the White Woman, Who was Taken Captive by the Indians in MDCCLV and Who Continued with Them Seventy Eight Years . . .* (Batavia, N.Y., 1842), edited by William Seaver (brother of the then-deceased James Seaver) and Ebenezer Mix. On this supposed-conversion, see June Namias’ introduction to *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, 38-39 and Namias’ *White Captives* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 326-328. For a detailed publishing history of Jemison’s narrative, see Namias’ introduction to *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, p. 33-43.

¹⁰ More offensively, a plaque on the Chambersburg trail, marking the location of Jemison’s initial capture in Buchanan valley, Pennsylvania, calls Jemison the “white squaw of the Genessee.”

¹¹ Writing on “as-told-to” narratives often addresses the problem of differentiating the writer from the narrator in these texts. Karen Oakes has written about the difficulty of locating Jemison’s voice separately from Seaver’s as a tension between oral transmission and writing. See “We Planted, Tended, and Harvested Our Corn: Gender, Ethnicity, and Transculturation in *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*” *Women and Language* 18.1 (1995) 45-51. Michelle Burnham discusses the competing voices of Jemison/Dickewanis and Seaver in the narrative. See “However Extravagant the Pretention: Bivocalism and U.S. Nation-Building in *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 23.3 (2001):327-333. Elena Ortells Montón terms Seaver’s authorship of Jemison’s narrative “rhetorical drag” in “*A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*: Rhetorical Drag and the Defiance of Hegemonic Cultural Models,” *ATLANTIS* 32.1 (June 2010): 73–86. Because my intent here is to put Jemison’s narrative into conversation with thematically-related popular literature of the 1820s, I read Seaver’s 1824 text as the narrative of Mary Jemison, the literary figure, here and throughout my discussion, referring to the literary Mary Jemison as its narrator and protagonist, (though acknowledging that some differences must exist between this figure and the historical Mary Jemison.) For this reason, I call her by the name ascribed in the title, rather than her Seneca Name, Dehgewanus (spelled Dickewamis in the first edition of Jemison’s narrative, Deh-he-wä-mis in some later editions, and variously elsewhere), as Susan Walsh appropriately does in reading her narrative as Native autobiography. See Susan Walsh “‘With Them Was My Home’: Native American Autobiography and *A Narrative*

cultural or behavioral kinship, (rather than through the fiction of Jemison's "biological" whiteness), I argue, that this narrative is best understood.



Figure 2: "Statue of Mary Jemison" at her gravesite, Letchworth State Park in Western New York
Lukas Neville, September 5, 2009, Flickr, Creative Commons Attribution



Figure 3: "Mary Jemison Plaque," Chambersburg Trail, Buchanan Valley, Pennsylvania
Claes Jonsson, n.d. <<http://www.claesjonsson.com/Jemison.htm>>

"The monument marking the home of the "White Squaw of the Genessee" prior to her capture by the French and Indians is 3 miles north. The remainder of Mary Jemison's life was spent as an Indian."

of the *Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*," *American Literature* 64.1 (1992): 49-70. Laura L. Mielke also treats Jemison's narrative as Native autobiography. See *Moving Encounters: Sympathy and the Indian Question in Antebellum Literature* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 78-85.

This chapter reads Jemison's narrative in light of these non-biological kinship relationships that dominate her narrative, and which ultimately articulate her Indianness, rather than her whiteness. Further, the narrative reveals Jemison's supposed whiteness as culturally-constructed through the nationally-conceived figure of the white woman, with which Jemison's text is in conversation despite its pretense to biological fixedness. First, I take up the tension between the Western bio-logic of racial identity and the native cultural logic of kinship at work in Jemison's tale of adoption. I then move to a discussion of her "interracial" marriages, connecting the history of legal racial determination in federal Indian law and "anti-miscegenation" law to the particular position of a woman whose landed property is determined both by white patriarchal and native matrilineal systems. Lastly, I draw upon models of white femininity in theories of republican motherhood and manifest domesticity, to show how the role of women in the early national period is dependent upon assumedly-biological kinship relations and corresponding domestic spaces, and what is at stake in early republican literatures that call this prioritization of biology into question.

Though scholars have had much difficulty placing Jemison's narrative within the genre of the captivity narrative, this text might be better regarded in its relation to other popular American literatures of the 1820s, as the discussions of writers such as Harry Brown, Annette Kolodny, and (most explicitly) Ezra Tawil suggest. The model of white womanhood with which I am most concerned is also visible in literary texts contemporary to Seaver's, particularly in the popular, distinctly "American," literary genre of the 1820s: the frontier romance. In novels such as Lydia Maria Child's *Hobomok* (1824), James Fenimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans* (1826) and Catherine Maria Sedgewick's *Hope Leslie* (1827) the figure of the "white woman" in (potential or actual) interracial kinship relations with Indians is central to the storyline. It is with these

texts that I find *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* in direct conversation, along with the body of federal Indian law that comes to impress upon relations of “interracial” kinship relations and domestic arrangements between “whites” and “Indians.” In my discussion, I intend to highlight the conflation of race and culture in the ideology of “the White Woman” of the Genesee. This conflation illuminates the ways in which the bio-logic of race is imposed upon claims of cultural “whiteness” or “Indianness,” and how early republican discourses of kinship are dependent upon the bio-logic of racial formation. A closer reading of the challenges to this bio-logic in Jemison’s narrative will suggest new ways for reading kinship relations in this and other texts that re-figure “the white woman” as a cultural trope not necessarily dependent upon notions of racial biologism.

The Cultural Logic of Adoption and the “White” Woman of the Genesee

The daughter of Scotch-Irish parents who emigrated to North America, Mary Jemison was captured by the Shawnees in 1758. Though her parents, two of her brothers, and her sister were killed by the Shawnees, she was adopted into a Seneca family, married (twice) within her Indian community, raised her children among them, and remained with the Senecas for the rest of her long life. It was not until 1823 that James Seaver sought her out and heard her life story, writing and publishing the “as-told-to” narrative the following year. By that time, Jemison’s story was situated within an established genre of white women’s captivity narratives that relied on clear racial distinctions between whites and Indians.¹² Constructed across various revised

¹² June Namias discusses the genre of the white woman’s captivity narrative extensively in *White Captives*, characterizing the most prominent female types as “the Survivor, the Amazon, and the Frail Flower,” the last of these being most prominent after 1820 (24). It is clear that Jemison differs greatly from Namias’ “Frail Flower,” who rarely recovers from the trauma of her captivity and whose narrative often contains elements of “brutality, sadomasochistic and titillating elements, strong racist language, pleas for sympathy and commiseration with the author’s suffering, special appeals to her sad lot as a distressed mother, and occasional invectives against dirt and sex among Indians” (37). Significantly, Namias regards Jemison’s story as an evolving one, charting it through the

editions and novelized retellings since her narrative's first publication, Mary Jemison's story has elicited critical work that often attempts to place her within the framework of the white woman's captivity narrative, attesting to an ongoing desire to render her story appropriate to the conventions of the genre, while wrestling with the problem of how to place a figure who is often described in "transcultural" terms.¹³ Jemison's portrayal as a "white Indian" presents a certain degree of irony as the racially-construed categories "white" and "Indian" (following the history of racial biologism prevalent during the nineteenth century and from which a more recent history of social-race theory cannot fully free ideologies of race) are generally assumed to be mutually exclusive. The phrase "white Indians," employed to describe Anglo-Americans who, though ("biologically") white, adopt the cultural designation "Indian," does not break down the bio-logic of racial identity.¹⁴ Rather, the construction suggests a difference in how "white" and "Indian" identities are understood and maintained. In this construction, the retention of the adjective "white," referring to an essentialist notion of "whiteness" as an inherent, biological quality that cannot be lost works against the designation "Indian" as cultural identifier that can be assumed, even by people who are not racially "Indian." This epithet that so frequently accompanies

various editions of Seaver's narrative and noting that Jemison as a figure is remade throughout her literary "life cycle" (114). Christopher Castiglia also discusses the difficulty of placing Jemison among other representations of the white female captive. See *Bound and Determined: Captivity, Culture-Crossing, and White Womanhood from Mary Rowlandson to Patty Hearst* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 9. James Axtell discusses the captivity narrative genre more generally in *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

¹³ For examples of such discussions, see Christopher Castiglia, *Bound and Determined*, 34-48; Karen Oakes, "We Planted, Tended, and Harvested Our Corn," 45-51; Pauline Turner Strong *Captive Selves, Captivating Others: The Politics and Poetics of Colonial American Captivity Narratives* (Boulder Colorado: Westview Press, 1999), 2, 145; and Hilary Wyss, "Captivity and Conversion," *American Indian Quarterly* 23.3/4 (1999): 64-65.

¹⁴ I use this term to refer to the racial logic of biologism, as defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "the interpretation of human life from a strictly biological point of view," and as can be particularly found in the scientific racism that emerges as the dominant discourse of race in the nineteenth century. My use here follows Eric Cheyfitz, who uses the term bio-logic in opposition to a cultural logic of identification and identity-formation, which he holds is a more appropriate paradigm by which to understand American Indian identity. See Eric Cheyfitz, "The (Post)Colonial Construction of Indian Country" in *The Columbia Guide to American Indian Literatures of the United States since 1945*, ed. Cheyfitz (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 16. Further references to *The Columbia Guide* are from Cheyfitz's book-length introduction to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text. William Stanton discusses the development of biological understandings of race throughout the nineteenth century more generally in *The Leopard's Spots* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

depictions of Mary Jemison reminds readers of the permanence of biological identifiers, and the potential transience of the cultural ones: although Jemison can and does “become” Indian in Seaver’s narrative, she never ceases to be “white.” Examining the cultural kinship relations by which Mary Jemison identifies both herself and her “mixed-blooded” children as Indians challenges constructions of identity that are based around imagined quantities of Indian or white “blood.” Jemison’s narrative works against the bio-logic of race, particularly exhibited in the kinship and gender relations she describes. In this respect, Jemison defies models of white womanhood characteristic to the captivity narrative genre, exchanging this model for a narrative centered on her adoption into and kinship role within the Seneca community.

In her adoption ceremony, the Seneca women who will become Jemison’s sisters couple welcoming their new sister and mourning their lost brother, who she will “replace” in their family. Their mournful lamentation at his loss is immediately followed by the introduction of their new family member as they say, ““His spirit has seen our distress, and sent us a helper whom with pleasure we greet. Dickewamis has come: then let us receive her with joy! She is handsome and pleasant! Oh! she is our sister, and gladly we welcome her here. In the place of our brother she stands in our tribe. With care we will guard her from trouble; and may she be happy till her spirit shall leave us’” (77).¹⁵ As Jemison explains that she has been brought into their family to replace a brother who had been killed, she also relates that this is a common practice among Indian communities who lose members in war. The substitution of an adopted sister for a supposed blood relation implies that the weight of the kinship relation rests in a cultural or behavioral, rather than a biological determination. This holds even truer when we

¹⁵ The spellings of all Indian names I use are from Seaver’s first edition of Jemison’s narrative, published in 1824 (and on which June Namias’ scholarly edition is based), unless otherwise indicated. The English spellings of these names vary across other historical documents, as does the last name of Mary Jemison and her descendents. I keep Seaver’s original spellings merely for consistency with the narrative about which I am most concerned here.

recognize that characterizing this brother as “biological” kin would be a matter of conjecture. That is, we do not know whether this brother was biologically related to them. Jemison’s status as sister is equal to that of her new family’s dead brother in this equation (“she *is* our sister;” not merely “like” a sister), as the adoption articulated in this welcoming reception fully incorporates her into the family structure.

Later, when she returns to her “Indian mother” and sisters after two years separation from them, Jemison recounts that “the warmth of their feelings, the kind reception which I met with, and the continued favors that I received at their hands, rivetted [*sic*] my affection for them so strongly that I am constrained to believe that I loved them as I should have loved my own sister had she lived, and I had been brought up with her” (89). Like her adopted family, Jemison explains her feelings of kinship by substituting the memory of a dead blood relation, citing her familial love as no different than that she might have for a blood relation. Familial presence – implying kinship as behavioral rather than biological relation – marks Jemison’s affections, as she cites the familial “warmth” of her sisters as eliciting and constituting this sense of kinship. Jemison’s account of her “Indian brother,” Kau-jises-tau-ge-au is similarly based on an emotive account of feelings of familial relation. Reflecting on his death, she calls him “an excellent man . . . [who] ever treated me with kindness . . . I mourned his loss as that of a tender brother, and shall recollect him through life with emotions of friendship and gratitude” (119). When contemplating leaving her family to join white settlers, she similarly describes her dependence on her now-grown son, Thomas, “To go myself, and leave him, was more than I felt able to do; for he had been kind to me, and was one on whom I placed great dependence” (119). In both instances, Jemison locates kinship within these feelings of kindness and dependence and in familial behavior that suggests a cultural understanding of family relations and values. What ties

Jemison to her Seneca family members is this cultural understanding of kinship – specifically, in the experience of especial kindness and dependence her various family members have shown her – which she prioritizes over a biological relation to her living white relatives and acts upon in her relations to her “Indian family.” Though Jemison certainly laments the loss of her immediate (biological) family, she does not express any special feelings of connection to other whites to whom she is related by blood, but emphasizes feelings of familial belonging as she describes her familial interactions.

Throughout her narrative, Jemison continually describes this relation to her adopted family as comparable to a blood relation, emphasizing the fact that her adoption does not render her any lesser status among “Indian family” members. She recounts, “I was ever considered and treated by them as a real sister, the same as though I had been born of their mother” (78). Jemison’s sisters diligently teach her the Seneca language and make her accustomed to their way of life, and thereby bring her into a cultural kinship that bears no hint of being a substandard form of family. For the Anglo-American audience of Jemison’s narrative, however, these familial relations can *only* be explained by their comparison to blood kinship. Even in interpreting her adoption, the referent of blood-relations and their recognition is continually in the background of Jemison’s tale. It is not enough that we learn that she has become these women’s adopted sister; she must explain this cultural kinship relation to her predominantly-white readership “as if” it were a relation of blood, suggesting the limits of bio-logic for conceiving non-biological kinship relations – limits which will also become apparent in federal Indian law’s determination of Indian identity, particularly under the infamous court of Chief Justice Roger Taney.

The 1846 case of *United States v. Rogers* begins with a question of jurisdiction for a murder trial. Whether William S. Rogers (a “white” man who claimed to have been adopted into a Cherokee tribe) is to be tried by federal or Cherokee courts depends upon the legal determination of his racial identity. As the case approaches the Supreme Court, Rogers’ alleged murder of Jacob Nicholson takes a back seat to the question of identification it raises: can a white man, adopted into the Cherokee tribe become an Indian? Eric Cheyfitz points to a tension between bio-logic and cultural logic in determining Native American identity in the discourse of federal Indian law, illuminating the problem of determining Indian identity solely on the basis of blood quantum while diminishing the importance of tribal recognition and community. Two potentially conflicting definitions of “Indian” emerge from this tension. Discussing *United States v. Rogers*, Cheyfitz writes “it should be emphasized, adoption by the community did *not* make an ‘Indian,’ a Western racial-political category, but a community member, a person belonging to a Native cultural category” (23). Ultimately, the case is specifically concerned with a biologically, racially-conceived legal definition of “Indian,” and concludes that Rogers, though adopted by the Cherokee tribe, is “a white man, of the white race, and therefore not within the exception [of the law in relation to Indians].”¹⁶ The peculiar wording of the *Rogers* decision, which refers only to white men, Cheyfitz notes, “suggests white youths and white females *can* become Indians through the cultural logic of adoption” (22). Putting aside the gender-distinction that *Rogers* raises, (to which I will return in the following section) I would like to further explore the similarities of this cultural logic of adoption as it applies to the representation of Mary Jemison.

Apart from their gender difference, William S. Rogers’ adoptive situation is not dissimilar to Jemison’s: he was a white man who claimed to have been adopted into the

¹⁶ *United States v. Rogers*, 45 U.S. 573 (1846).

Cherokee community; he had married a Cherokee woman with whom he had several children. Upon his adoption into the Cherokee tribe Rogers claimed that he “became and continued to be one of them, and made the same his home, without any intention of returning to the said United States.”¹⁷ As Cheyfitz argues, “Rogers’ self-identification as a ‘Cherokee Indian’ suggests an important tension between the cultural-political identity ‘Cherokee’ and what was at this moment emerging as the racial designation ‘Indian’” (21). However, it becomes clear that the court is not concerned with whether Rogers or Nicholson are accepted members of an Indian community, the situation of their homes among – and comprised of – people who identify as Cherokee, or their relationships with Indian people or culture, as the *Rogers* decision refuses a cultural logic of identity. The court’s final verdict tells us that Rogers “is not an ‘Indian,’ within the meaning of the law” because “no white man can rightfully become a citizen of the Cherokee tribe of Indians, either by marriage, residence, adoption, or any other means, unless the proper authority of the United States shall authorize such incorporation.”¹⁸ The emphasis on Rogers’ (biological) whiteness indicates that there is no way to become Indian in this determination; both “whiteness” and “Indianness” are confined to strict categories of race. Rogers’ designation of his “home” as with the Cherokee (and therefore not within the United States) is also of no import to the court’s decision.

Ultimately, the *Rogers* case is more concerned with who has the authority to determine Indian identity than with questions of what constitutes that identity. As Cheyfitz tells us that “the identity of ‘Cherokee Indian’ articulates a coupling of cultural logic with bio-logic,” (21) so does the designation of Mary Jemison as a “white Indian,” as the adjective and the noun here refer to

¹⁷ *United States v. Rogers*, 45 U.S. 568.

¹⁸ *United States v. Rogers*, 45 U.S. 571, 570.

two oppositional paradigms of identification. In this construction only the former term designates race, while the latter refers to the cultural identity she assumes through her adoption.

Rogers also raises questions of blood quantum in its legal rendering of Indian identity, as it asks whether the 1834 trade and intercourse act can be applied to

crimes committed by natives of the Indian tribes of full blood, against native Indians of full blood only; or do the said section and proviso have reference also to Indians (natives), or others adopted by, and permanently resident within, the Indian tribes; or have they relation to the progeny of Indians by whites or by negroes, or of whites or negroes by Indians, born or permanently resident within the Indian tribes and limits, or to whites or free negroes born and permanently resident in the tribes, or to negroes owned as slaves, and resident within the Indian tribes, whether procured by purchase, or there born the property of Indians.¹⁹

I quote here at length to convey the complicated nature of this passage, which demonstrates the problem of the bio-logic of “blood” for determining identity in a society in which racial mixture, in its many possible forms, is undeniable.²⁰ Further, the logic of blood quantum denies the cultural logic that inextricably links Indian identity to Indian culture. If one can be identified as Indian by virtue of having a certain percentage of Indian “blood” alone, then one can be Indian even without access to Indian land, language, customs, et cetera. By rendering “Indian” a purely biological (or, as often characterized, “racial”) category, the importance of the cultural basis for identity is not only replaced with something that the United States government can regulate; it threatens to devalue cultural practices as essential to Indian identity.

The occurrence of adoption of whites into Native communities, however, is indicative of the insufficiency of this bio-logic for determining identity and belonging in cultural terms. Located within the practices of everyday life, the cultural logic of family and community belonging is evident in both Jemison’s narrative and the *Rogers* case, as whites are adopted or

¹⁹ *United States v. Rogers*, 45 U.S. 570.

²⁰ The pairing of blood quantum requirements and tribal enrollment as requirements for federal recognition of Indian status illuminates the continued political and social importance of bio-logic for determining Native identity.

marry into Indian families and become full members of their communities. In opposition to rigid notions of biological race, an understanding of identity as more complexly involved with community relations and daily living reveals the cultural relation of adoption as an equally (if not more) legitimate basis for Native identity. Although in *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, a cultural logic of adoption works against the bio-logic of racial identity, even in interpreting Jemison's adoption, the importance of blood-relations and their recognition is continually in the background of writing on "white Indians." Perhaps because of the emphasis on blood relations, discourses of inherited "interracial" kinship overshadow those of adoptive kinship in much of American literature. Closely accompanying these discussions of interracial blood is the discourse of interracial sexual kinship, often highlighted specifically (for reasons I will discuss below) as interracial marriage relations.

"Interracial" Marriage, Land and the (Un)Making of White Womanhood²¹

One of the most prominent early republican literary discourses on Indian-white "interracial" marriage is, curiously, about two marriages that never occur: Cora Munro's would-be forced marriage to Magua and her marriage-in-death to Uncas in James Fenimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans*. The (unsurprising) implication in Cooper's story is that such a marriage

²¹ Throughout this section I refer to "interracial" marriage between "Indians" and "whites." My persistent inverted commas here are meant to convey the problematic assumptions in terming these marriages "interracial," i.e., that "Indians" and "whites" constitute two, mutually-exclusive "races," and that the members of such "interracial" unions can easily be placed into one group or the other. As I argue, this is not simply the case with Mary Jemison, as can be seen when we take cultural identity into account. I will occasionally use the term "amalgamation" to refer to such "interracial" marriages, as this popularly-used word described sexual relations between whites and non-whites from the early republic through the antebellum period, and appeared in much contemporary discourse on the topic of intermarriage. I will not, however, use the word "miscegenation" unless referring to writers who specifically use this term (such as Peggy Pascoe) as this word, not coined until 1863, is anachronistic to the texts I discuss here. In addition, I refer to marriage rather than to heterosexual sexual relations, in general, because marriage is the more prevalent topic in the texts I discuss. Further, marriage has legal implications regarding legitimacy and inheritance, and therefore becomes the more pressing concern throughout the history of anti-amalgamation and anti-miscegenation discourse in the United States. I will discuss some of the more obvious implications for prioritizing legal marriage in anti-amalgamation discourse later in this section.

would be but a “horrid alternative” to Cora’s death.²² Further, an “interracial” sexual union would seem to pose a “threat” of sorts to Cora’s claim to white womanhood and its couched assumptions of sexual-racial purity. This threat is mitigated, of course, by Colonel Munro’s revelation that his daughter Cora, born of a different mother than her fair sister Alice, is “descended from that unfortunate class who are so basely enslaved to administer to the wants of a luxurious people” (180). That is, Cora does not have the claim to white womanhood that her sister does, according to societal rules of hypodescent. As Colonel Munro explains the status of his (though apparently remotely) racially-mixed daughter to Duncan Heyward, “these unfortunate beings are considered of a race inferior to your own” (180). The bio-logic of race (and racial hierarchy) is clear in Cooper’s text as Hawkeye, although he appears culturally closer to the Indians with whom he associates than with the white settlers, must continually remind us that he is a “white” man “without a cross” of “Indian blood.”

Like Hawkeye’s cultural (though not “cross-blooded”) Indianness, Cora’s cultural whiteness appears subordinate to her biologically (hypodescended) race in the novel. Still, she seems to have enough purchase in white womanhood for Hawkeye to reject the Delawares’ funeral song about the “future prospects” of Cora and Uncas at their dual-interment. We read that he “shook his head, like one who knew the error of their simple creed” and that “[h]appily for the self-command of both Heyward and Munro, they knew not the meaning of the wild sounds they heard” (387). Apparently, (though not suitably white enough to marry Duncan Heyward,) Cora is still white enough that these white men reject any semblance of her marriage to an Indian, even in death.

²² James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans*, ed. John McWilliams (1826; reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 125. Further references to *The Last of the Mohicans* are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text. For further discussion of the theme of interracial marriage in the frontier romance, see Harry Brown, “‘The Horrid Alternative’: Miscegenation and Madness in the Frontier Romance,” *Journal of American Culture* 24.3-4 (2001): 137- 151.

While Cooper seems particularly careful to foreclose any possibility of white-Indian marriage in *Last of the Mohicans*, in the more controversial Catherine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*, (published the following year, in 1827) white-Indian marriage is not excluded from the captivity narrative plot. In this story line, Hope's sister Faith Leslie is captured by the Pequot chief Mononotto, who has come to reclaim his children, Magawesca and Oneco, who have been servants to the white settler-colonist family who have adopted Hope and Faith. Several years later, Magawesca informs Hope of her sister's condition, telling her that she has married Oneco, (who had saved her life on the occasion of her captivity) and helps to arrange a meeting between Hope and Faith, only for Faith and Magawesca to be captured by English soldiers. Although Magawesca is imprisoned, Faith is restored to the care of her sister's guardians. But Faith is not happy with the family that she "racially" resembles; she remembers little of her sister or her childhood, and can no longer speak or understand English. Ultimately, Faith is rescued by her husband Oneco, and returns to the family of her marriage. In Sedgwick's story, Faith (whose original name is Mary before she is rechristened following the death of her biological mother), resists the narrative of captivity (just as Mary Jemison does) in her refusal to reenter white society. Faith is never permanently reclaimed in *Hope Leslie*; her choice to remain with her Indian husband and family still stands at the conclusion of Sedgwick's novel.

The white settlers' inability to reclaim Faith as a white woman is explained, primarily, through the story's assertion of her cultural Indianness. Her complete loss of both English and her white community's religion (her Catholicism serves as little consolation to the Puritans), and her insistence on retaining the dress and ornamentation of the Indians after she is captured by the English mark her as culturally irrecoverable. The implication here is that the biological claim to whiteness is not sufficient to retain white culture. Mary Jemison's clothes are also vested with

such cultural significance in the accounts of her being re-dressed “in complete Indian style” (76) as part of her adoption ceremony, and in Seaver’s description of Jemison on the occasion of their meeting as “made and worn after the Indian fashion” in his introduction (56). Despite this description, however, the 1856 edition of her narrative includes a frontispiece of Jemison “Relating her History to the Author,” wearing a dress, apron, shawl and bonnet more distinctive of white settler colonists.²³ Some degree of cultural whiteness is preserved in this imagining of Jemison, presenting for the reader with that rendered impossible in image of Faith Leslie in her persistently “savage” attire.

Apart from this visual marker of culture, Faith’s Indianness is also described in terms of the kinship she feels for her Indian family, which has replaced what she no longer feels for her white sister. In their last meeting, we read that “there had been nothing in the intercourse of the sisters to excite Hope’s affections” and thus she recognizes that Faith can no longer be her sister in feeling, despite their biological relation.²⁴ Further, Sedgwick describes Faith’s marital kinship in terms of its equivalency to biological relation, as Magawesca tells Hope that “she is dear to Mononotto as if his own blood ran in her veins” (188). This “as if” equivocates Faith’s marital kinship with blood relation, just as Mary Jemison’s adoptive kinship with her Indian family is represented in terms of its equality to biological kinship. With Faith, as with Mary Jemison, if cultural kinship – a kinship marked by relations of behavior and feelings – has not trumped biological kinship, it must at least be regarded on equal terms. We see here a significant difference between Hawkeye’s ability to assume (to some extent) Indian culture and Cora’s position as a white(?) captive and would-be wife of an Indian or Faith Leslie’s assimilation into

²³ See Lewis Henry Morgan’s engraving “Relating her History to the Author” in James E. Seaver, *Life of Mary Jemison: De-he-wä-mis* (New York and Auburn: Miller, Orton, and Mulligan, 1856), frontispiece.

²⁴ Catherine Maria Sedgwick *Hope Leslie*, ed. Mary Kelley (1827; reprint, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 338. Further references to *Hope Leslie* are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

the community of her husband. The gender distinction of the *Rogers* case (i.e., that although white men cannot, white women might be able to become Indian) seems to precede it in the logic that places white women as particularly – both sexually and racially – vulnerable in the frontier romance.

In early republican constructions of race (both in the frontier romance and elsewhere), the sexual encounter with the racial Other is coded as a point of biological contact through which race might be transferrable. According to these ideologies of racial formation, women have the greater (or at least different) potential to “receive” race than men. Ezra Tawil argues that Mary Jemison’s narrative is involved in parsing out questions of Indian and white identity as “it must tell us what makes white people [and particularly, white women, I would argue] white.”²⁵ This discourse of white womanhood regards white women as people who must be protected from the racially Other – particularly the male racial Other, who poses a sexual threat to white feminine (sexual, and therefore racial) purity. In this sense, for women, the prospect of “going native” has not merely cultural but sexual implications, which (as will become apparent in the following section) are also construed to imply biological significance through the potential for “interracial” motherhood.

If the ideology of the different claims for men and women’s “racial” potential in the *Rogers* case holds, the logic of whiteness and Indianness is a gendered logic. Either “Indianness” (coded as a category of race and understood biologically) might be transferred to women more easily than to men (i.e., through the heterosexual encounter by which men “give” and women “receive” race) or the cultural construal of “Indian” can be adopted more readily by women (who, perhaps in alignment with narratives of captivity, are perceived as more susceptible to

²⁵ Ezra F. Tawil, *The Making of Racial Sentiment: Slavery and the Birth of the Frontier Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 103. Further references to *The Making of Racial Sentiment* are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

cultural “corruption” than men). In either case, the result is that white women are positioned at the center of discourses of “interracial” marriage. It is clear why the emphasis on Jemison’s marriages to two subsequent Indian husbands would be of particular interest to Seaver’s readers (either as titillating or horrifying details of her story) despite the difference of her narrative from prevalent tales of white women and Indian men in the frontier romance.

Much as Cheyfitz describes the circular relation between bio-logic and cultural logic in *Rogers*, Tawil argues that the logic of whiteness in Jemison’s and other captivity narratives expresses a cultural rather than a racial logic. The preservation of Jemison’s whiteness, Tawil holds, is representative of the historical shift towards scientific racism that occurs between hers and earlier captivity narratives which “distinguished the Indian, not by ‘racial’ characteristics, but by what might properly be called national and religious ones” (101-102). In this sense, he writes, “her narrative could do something that narratives such as [Mary] Rowlandson’s could not: it defined the captive’s race as something that could not be lost or taken away. To do so, it had to create a distinction between cultural identity, or her Englishness, from national identity or race. While the former was classified as a contingent and alterable condition, the latter was defined as essential and permanent” (101). If the bio-logic of race is prioritized over the cultural logic of belonging to a community in this shift, then this understanding of “whiteness” parallels the one found in *Rogers*. Jemison’s adoption and marriage into the Seneca tribe, then, represents what Tawil refers to as a “cultural corruption, rather than any form of racial pollution” (102). This suggests the tension between bio-logic and cultural logic as not only referring to overlapping modes of identification, but as clashing in their confusion with one another. In this confusion one realizes the conflict between Jemison’s whiteness persistent in retellings of her story and the Seneca identity expressed in her narrative, in which the ideological foundations of

white womanhood Tawil describes are evacuated. In a closer reading of Jemison's narrative, one finds that cultural logic does trump bio-logic.

One of its most significant divergences from the majority of women's captivity narratives (and the rhetoric of racially/sexually "pure" white womanhood one would expect to find there) is Jemison's relation to Indian men. Having been adopted into a Seneca community, Jemison expresses no need for protection from Indian men (though she does describe the white male military as a threat). Jemison's is not a story of violation or degradation at the hands of Indians, as even the circumstances of her arranged marriage end in what she only describes as a loving relationship. Still, even as she recounts the virtues of her first husband, Jemison must account for their interracial relationship as a potential problem for her Anglo-American readers. She tells us,

Yet, Sheninjee was an Indian. The idea of spending my days with him, at first seemed perfectly irreconcilable to my feelings: but his good nature, generosity, tenderness, and friendship towards me, soon gained my affection; and, strange as it may seem, I loved him!—To me he was ever kind in sickness, and always treated me with gentleness; in fact, he was an agreeable husband, and a comfortable companion. We lived happily together till the time of our final separation, which happened two or three years after our marriage. (82)

Jemison makes no further reference to the union of a white woman and an Indian man as a problem in her narrative, but this marriage seems to solidify Jemison's sense of belonging with the Seneca. Significantly, Mary Jemison describes her feelings for Sheninjee as those of love. Resisting the racial proscriptions that would deny an Indian man ever to be "an agreeable husband, and a comfortable companion" to a white woman, Jemison's narrative provides an unusual – though not completely unheard of – account of a successful "interracial" marriage.

Jemison's account of her first husband is emphatic in her assertion of Sheninjee's especial kindness to her.²⁶ Lydia Maria Child presents a similar version of a particularly kind

²⁶ It is significant that Seaver (and subsequent editors in the narrative's later appendices) go to great lengths to convey the "savagery" of Jemison's second husband, the Seneca warrior Hiokattoo. Jemison does recount the

Indian husband to his white wife in *Hobomok*, published the same year as Seaver's first edition of Jemison's narrative. Though Child presents Hobomok as the epitome of the "noble savage" type and he is universally described as showing an almost idealizing reverence for Mary Conant, she decides to marry him only because her "true" love, Charles Brown (a white suitor rejected by Mary's father because of his radical religious beliefs), is believed to have been killed at sea. Thus, her marriage to the Indian occurs as a last resort of sorts when Mary, now in a state of depression, has come to regard Hobomok as the only being left to love her. While she marries Hobomok because of his love for her, rather than hers for him, Mary eventually comes to have genuine affection for her husband. His Indianness does not prevent him from being a good husband, and Mary eventually comes to describe Hobomok as "almost like an Englishman" in his suitability as a companion.²⁷ Still, their happiness is not meant to be, and when Charles Brown returns, alive(!), Hobomok graciously steps aside, divorcing Mary and "disappearing" to the west so that she and Charles can be together.

While *Hobomok* does not leave Mary Conant completely unrecoverable to her former community as a result of her first marriage, her divorce and the ultimate disappearance of the titular character suggests that this marriage (despite the story's suggestion of its inevitability)

kindness of her second husband on the occasion of his death, relating that "During the term of nearly fifty years that I lived with him, I received, according to Indian customs, all the kindness and attention that was my due as his wife. – Although war was his trade from his youth till old age and decrepitude stopt [sic] his career, he uniformly treated me with tenderness, and never offered an insult." (129). She also describes Hiokatoo's capacity for sympathy as he is "exasperated at the sight of so much inhumanity" and protects a Nanticoke woman who has been physically abused by her "white" husband (110). The history of Hiakatoo's career as a warrior is followed by a note in which Seaver tells his reader that this information derives not from Mary Jemison's account, but from George Jemison – the self-proclaimed white "cousin" of Mary who, as we later read, cheats her out of a great deal of property and whom the Seneca woman ceases to believe has any real relation to her. This place in the narrative most clearly distinguishes Jemison's narration from Seaver's. In later editions, Hiokatoo's "fierce" nature is further highlighted with illustrations and additional supposedly biographical information as Jemison's narrative is re-edited in ways that blatantly attempt to justify colonial expansion and genocide. Namias discusses these and other relevant additions in her introduction, (36-39).

²⁷ Lydia Maria Child, *Hobomok*, ed. Carolyn L. Karcher (1824; reprint New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 137. Further references to *Hobomok* are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

does not fit with the “natural” ontology of white womanhood. That is, Mary and Hobomok’s union was not meant to be. Mary Jemison’s emphasis on feeling in her account of her marriage to Sheninjee marks a possibility that the frontier romance continually forecloses – the possibility of a white woman’s romantic/sexual desire for an Indian man, one that even Child’s relatively progressive novel refuses to allow.

Despite Hobomok’s unwaveringly “noble” nature, to the other characters in Mary Conant’s small Salem community, her marriage is rendered (with too-familiar rhetoric) worse than death. Her father, upon hearing news that his presumably-dead daughter is living and married to Hobomok exclaims, “I could more readily have covered her sweet face with the clods than bear this” (132). In effect, her marriage to Hobomok amounts to a social suicide for Mary. After her marriage, she considers herself lost to her biological family and the white community and degraded in their (and her own) view. While religious difference was the sole objection Mr. Conant had for Mary’s first choice of husband, her non-Christian marriage – a marriage that is also marked as intercultural, if not “interracial” – appears a far worse transgression. Religion also seems to mask an implied sexual objection with Mr. Conant’s concern about Mary’s choice “to lie in the bosom of a savage and mingle her prayers with a heathen” (133). The “prayers” that the couple mingles result in the birth of a son.

The reproduction of kind, and even loving, Indian men in characters such as Uncas, Oneco, and Hobomok still deny the suitability of these characters as husbands to white women in the frontier romance. We would be mistaken in regarding objections to such marriages as solely concerned with maintaining either the racial or cultural “purity” of white women, however. As Peggy Pascoe and others have argued, white anxieties about interracial marriage in the United States were deeply invested in the retention of “white privilege” regarding the inheritance of

property. While laws prohibiting “interracial” marriage were inextricable from issues of gender and sexuality, (with many laws dealing specifically with demarking the racial groups with whom white women could not legally marry), “marriage between white men and Indian women was ... intimately linked to American land settlement” and therefore often recognized by legislators.²⁸ As *U.S. v. Rogers* suggests, the perceived difference between the potential for white women and white men to become Indians, might also be characterized as a greater governmental interest in the identification of potential citizens (white men) than in noncitizens (women and Indians).

If, as Pascoe holds, marriage was used “to confirm the land and property rights of White husbands,” marriages between Indian men and white women – two already legally disenfranchised groups when it came to property rights – do not figure heavily in the literature on “miscegenation” law in the United States.²⁹ Namias identifies concerns regarding Indians and land that were prevalent during the early part of the century as coming to bear upon these depictions of relations between white women and Indian men, explaining the racist justifications for Indian removal – “Certainly beastly men did not deserve to keep American land” – as paralleling anxieties about sexual relations between whites and Indians.³⁰ This parallel risks figuring white women as potential “property,” as well – that sexual property which “beastly” men also do not deserve to “possess.”

²⁸ See Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 10, 95. Karen Woods Weierman also emphasizes that interracial marriage is tied closely to land possession. See, especially, her discussion of Cooper’s *The Pioneers* and *Johnson v. M’Intosh* in *One Nation, One Blood: Interracial Marriage in American Fiction, Scandal, and Law, 1820-1870*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), 87.

²⁹ Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*, 96.

³⁰ June Namias, *White Captives*, 99. In a similar vein, Pascoe writes “After the American Revolution . . . some Americans began to welcome the prospect of marriage between the self-consciously ‘white’ citizens of the new United States and the Indians whose land (quite literally) grounded the emerging nation.” “Amalgamation” between whites and Indians was even endorsed by such prominent figures as Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, and William H. Crawford. See *What Comes Naturally*, 94-95.

This figuring, however, posits early republican gender hierarchies that did not necessarily apply to white adoptees into Indian communities. As G. Peter Jemison (a descendant of Mary Jemison) reminds us, “Adoption in the 18th century meant something more than an Indian name; it included rights and responsibilities which Seneca women inherited at birth, for we are a matrilineal society.”³¹ It is through her Seneca identification that Mary Jemison acquires the land on which she will live with her family following the Revolutionary War, until her old age. Through the 1797 Treaty of Big Tree (by which the Senecas sold all land east of the Genesee River), Jemison was formally granted a land grant on Gardow Flats, the land she had harvested with African American men during the Sullivan Campaign. Though this claim was opposed by Red Jacket, a prominent member of the Seneca community, this land claim helped to further establish Jemison’s identity as an Indian woman. However, as Namais tells us, Jemison, Hiokatoo, and her children are by this time positioned both geographically and metaphorically “between the encroaching white world and the beleaguered Indian one.”³² In 1816, white neighbors convinced Jemison to petition for U.S. citizenship in order to gain legal title to this land.

The necessity of holding title to an Indian land claim becomes clear with the 1823 Supreme Court case, *Johnson v. M’Intosh*, involving a single plot of land in Illinois, sold both by the Piankshaw Indians and under a grant from the United States. The case was concerned with distinguishing “possession” from “ownership” of land, questioning “the power of Indians to give, and of private individuals to receive, a title which can be sustained in the courts of this country.”³³ After Jemison was granted citizenship in New York State in 1817, she continued to

³¹ G. Peter Jemison, Epilogue, in Rayna M. Gangi, *Mary Jemison: White Woman of the Seneca: a novel* (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publications, 1996), 151.

³² Namias, *White Captives*, 185.

³³ *Johnson v. M’Intosh*, 21 U.S. 543, 572 (1824).

live at Gardow Flats with some of her children, and with the title to her land, was able to give or sell portions of it to some of her white neighbors.³⁴ By gaining title to her land, Jemison's dealings became more secure than were she to remain a non-titled possessor, but she does not have complete control over these legal dealings, which are from this point forward facilitated by white male agents.

According to her narrative, when Mary Jemison meets George Jemison, a man claiming to be a cousin biologically related to her through her white father, she allows him to use some of her land and he moves his family there. With the help of one of Jemison's white neighbors and due to Jemison's own inability to read English, this alleged "cousin" then succeeds in swindling Jemison out of over four hundred acres in an agreement by which she had meant to give him only forty. Namias appropriately notes the significance of a white man's scheming Jemison out of her land as representing another way in which she is marked as an Indian woman, as attempts to strip Jemison of her culturally-defined native identity are also accompanied by the eventual loss of most of her land.³⁵ Later, in 1831, (and according to Christopher Castiglia, because she has now become "uncomfortable among the growing numbers of white settlers in the region,") Jemison sold the remaining plots at Gardow Flats and moved with her daughters to the Seneca's Buffalo Creek Reservation, where she died in 1833.³⁶ The circumstances of Jemison's relationship to the land on which she lives and works are particular to her position a "white women among the Seneca," i.e., a woman whose land ownership is dependent upon both her position as a woman in a matrilineal society, as well as her position as a "white woman" whose

³⁴ It is interesting that Mary Jemison signs treaties – as a Seneca signatory – with the Federal government or other land dealers after she becomes a United States citizen – a century before the Indian Citizen Act. This is another way in which her mode of identification becomes necessarily transcultural as she negotiates her position within the Seneca community and with relation to the United States government.

³⁵ See Namias' *White Captives*, 186.

³⁶ Castiglia, *Bound and Determined*, 36.

marriages were with Indian men – men who do not have the same claims upon a wife (or her property) that white men would have under United States laws of coverture.

Namias acknowledges that “along with the will to take over Indian lands there appears to have been a covert anxiety that Indian men could indeed serve as attractive and companionate sexual partners.”³⁷ These concerns about property and sex are not easily separated when questions of legitimacy and inheritance are taken into consideration. If the retention of Jemison’s biological whiteness represents her Indianness as “cultural corruption, rather than any form of racial pollution” as Tawil would hold, what of the kinship relations that are formed through her marriages – particularly, the “racially-mixed” children she bears? Claims of Mary Jemison’s whiteness persist as a biological claim, but her narrative refuses a major trajectory of cultural whiteness, the traces of which are quite visible in the frontier romance: republican motherhood. My final section will treat Mary Jemison’s role as a mother and the ways her narrative, despite its persistent claims to Jemison’s whiteness, resists rhetorics of white republican motherhood and domesticity in her relation to her racially-mixed children. Just as Jemison’s dealings with land mark her position as “transcultural,” her domestic life is represented as involving “interracial” kinship relations.

“White” (Republican) Motherhood and the “Savage” (in the) House; or, “Mary Jemison’s Cabin”

As Namias, Castiglia, and others note, Jemison (like Faith Leslie) ultimately resists “white ‘protection’ or ‘rescue’” from her Indian community.³⁸ Though shortly after her adoption, Jemison expresses a wish to be “liberated from the Indians and to be restored to my white friends and my country,” (80) she later refuses to return to the white settler community when given the

³⁷ Namias, *White Captives*, 99.

³⁸ Castiglia, *Bound and Determined*, 36.

opportunity. Following the Seven Years' War, when the British government was actively attempting to recover white captives from the Indians to return them to white society, Jemison decided not to leave her Indian family, feeling that her familial ties to them were stronger than any biological ties she might have to whites elsewhere. Because bounties were offered as reward for redeeming captive whites, Jemison recounts the danger of her being forcibly "liberated" despite both her decision to remain with the Seneca and the decision of the council chiefs that "as it was my choice to stay, I might live amongst them quietly and undisturbed" (93). As a young widow following the death of her first husband, Jemison recounts the particular danger she encounters from a Dutchman who wishes to redeem her even against her will. While early in her narrative, when her Indian sisters whisk her away from the company of white settlers who they believe will take their captive sister back to white society, Jemison expresses a dejection that "seemed like a second captivity," (81) this later episode presents the possibility of yet another captivity.

Jemison positions herself as a fugitive of sorts in this account: "I was fully determined not to be redeemed at that time, especially with his assistance, I carefully watched his movements in order to avoid falling into his hands . . . He gave up the chase, and returned: but I, fearing that he might be lying in wait for me, stayed three days and three nights in an old cabin at Gardow, and then went back trembling at every step for fear of being apprehended" (93). This position of fugitivity – hiding in a cabin at Gardow, by now a familiar place in Jemison's narrative – repositions Jemison from the white captive in the earlier captivity plot to a position not unlike that of the two self-emancipated "negro" men she meets in 1779. Essentially, she hides in this cabin from a white man who threatens to capture and sell her away from her family – a far cry from the "liberty" she is supposedly offered by this transaction of "redemption." The

safety of this cabin also echoes the shelter Jemison and her children received in the “interracial” space of the fugitives’ cabin. The irony of her position here – as one who is redeemable (or saleable?) *because* she is white – grates against the danger of her previous position – as one subject to starvation and exposure to the elements in a white men’s campaign against the Indians (among whom, for this shared danger, Jemison must be counted).

As Jemison’s brother weighs in on the matter of her redemption, however, she is reinvested with traces of white womanhood that are recognizable in both the captivity narrative and the frontier romance. Entering into a quarrel with an elder of the tribe as to whether or not Jemison will be redeemed, she recounts that “my brother frankly told him that sooner than I should be taken by force, he would kill me with his own hands!” (93). Were this scene set in one of the earlier pages that constitute the captivity narrative portion of the text, we would easily read Kau-jises-ta-ge-au more as one of the savage figures in John Vanderlyn’s 1804 painting *The Death of Jane McCrea* than as a figure of brotherly protection. Jemison’s account of her affection for, and received from, her brother makes this a more complex scene, though. Remembering his especial “kindness . . . natural mildness of temper, and warmth and tenderness of affection,” she states, “If he had taken my life at the time when the avarice of the old King inclined him to procure my emancipation, it would have been done with a pure heart and from good motives” (120). When read in the tradition of the frontier romance, this brotherly sentiment is strikingly familiar, as the death of a female relation is presented as preferable to the degradation she might suffer when forcibly taken by an enemy. Had a brother of Cora Munro uttered these words, they would surely have been read as the chivalric last resort to protect white feminine honor. Admittedly, such a death, even at her brother’s hand, does not appeal to Jemison, but as she is reunited with her brother, her kinship ties with her Indian family are

reinforced. Though she tells of other white captives assisted to liberty (some by her own mother) this information is immediately followed by the occasion of Jemison's second marriage, to Hiokatoo, and the names of her children.

Perhaps the most compelling reason Jemison gives for remaining with the Seneca is her fear of how her children might be treated in white society, even by her biological relatives. Following the Revolutionary War, when her brother again offers her the opportunity to return to white society (though the Chiefs wish her now-grown son, Thomas, to remain) she explains:

[A]nother, more powerful, if possible [reason for remaining, apart from not wanting to leave Thomas] was, that I had got a large family of Indian children, that I must take with me; and that if I should be so fortunate as to find my relatives, they would despise them, if not myself; and treat us as enemies; or, at least with a degree of cold indifference, which I thought I could not endure. Accordingly, after I had duly considered the matter, I told my brother that it was my choice to stay and spend the remainder of my days with my Indian friends, and live with my family as I had heretofore done. (119-120)

Significantly, Jemison expresses no similar fears about raising her half-white children among the Seneca. There is a conspicuous absence of dualism in Mary Jemison's narrative when she discusses her white and her Indian families: she explains her feelings of adoptive kinship in terms of blood relations and she names her "Indian children" after her blood relatives who have been murdered by the Shawnees, obscuring the supposed racial lines of separation between those she identifies as kin.

In an apocryphal (though possible) story in which a younger Jemison actually does attempt to re-enter white society with her four-year-old son following the death of her first husband, she is given the ultimatum of abandoning her "half-Indian child," after which she instead chooses to re-join the Seneca and re-marry.³⁹ In a tradition in which the cultural logic of adoption would render one family, Jemison's choice exposes the bio-logic of blood quantum as restrictive for determining kinship relations. The difference between these contrasting receptions

³⁹ For an account of this story, see Susan Walsh "'With Them Was My Home,'" 56.

of Jemison's children is representative of the difference between using bio-logic or cultural logic in recognizing kin. Karen Oakes points to this difference in her discussion of the unidirectionality of (biological) ethnicity, as "a European American woman could become a Seneca, but a Seneca woman, even a physically white Seneca woman, could never 'become' European American. Nor, for that matter, could her 'Indian' children."⁴⁰ By this logic, the boundary between the white and Indian in the early republic is not only culturally, but biologically-construed, figured as "racial" difference, according to the laws of hypodescent. Through this positioning of Jemison's as a "white" mother of "Indian" children, the intertwined nature of these two logics for figuring the role of the white woman becomes clearer.

Tawil's claim that Jemison retains not only a biological but a cultural whiteness in her narrative holds that "her racial difference from her own children ultimately obstructs the formation of an Anglo-American household. The story of Jemison's family [particularly, the conflict – and eventual fratricide – between her sons] thus becomes an object lesson in the incommensurability of whiteness and Indianness defined as two essentially different forms of subjectivity."⁴¹ Jemison's narrative does not, however, suggest that the "Indianness" of her sons is the ultimate cause of her inability to prevent their tragic deaths. Neither does it suggest that Jemison "fails" as a mother because of either her "cultural" or "racial difference" from her children. As her account of her sons' murders tell us, Jemison has sufficient motherly affection for her children, but insufficient influence over them to keep them from the graver influences of alcohol to which she attributes each of their deaths. In examining this part of Jemison's narrative,

⁴⁰ Karen Oakes. "We Planted, Tended, and Harvested Our Corn: Gender, Ethnicity, and Transculturation in *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*" *Women and Language* 18.1 (1995), 50.

⁴¹ Tawil, *The Making of Racial Sentiment*, 107. Tawil's transfer of Jemison's whiteness from the biologic of race to the cultural logic of Anglo-American sentimentality does not explain the differences between Jemison's and other captivity narratives, nor does it account for her decision to remain in a Seneca community despite her supposed racial and cultural differences from her adopted family members. Placing white and Indian identifiers on the same cultural plane for comparison does, however, open up Jemison's narrative for examination as a story of transculturation.

what she refers to as “the use of ardent spirits amongst the Indians” and attributes to the influences of white society (84) ought not be conflated with “Indianness” – read as either cultural or racial.

Though Mary Jemison’s whiteness is construed as “essential and permanent,” it is *not* (sufficiently) transferrable (either as racial or cultural whiteness) to her “Indian” children. These children are not only culturally Seneca, but “racially” “Indian,” despite the “white blood” (or, arguably, “white culture”) of their mother. The difference in how the bio-logic of racial hypodescent would categorize the races of “the white woman” and her “Indian children” prevents Jemison from carrying out the role of the (white) republican mother. If, as Linda Kerber holds, “the model republican woman was a mother” – and particularly, a mother of sons, she was a mother of *white* sons (i.e., future republican citizens), and not the Seneca children that Mary Jemison raises, children who might be figured as potential enemies (or, at the very least, “foreigners”) by Jemison’s biological relatives.⁴²

Child’s novel compensates for this problem of “interracial” motherhood through the complete assimilation of Mary Conant and Hobomok’s son into Anglo-American culture. Raised by his mother and Charles Brown after his biological father’s departure, we read in the novel’s conclusion that Charles Hobomok Conant is fully incorporated into the white society of this nuclear family and educated at Cambridge in England. Moreover, “his father was seldom spoken of; and by degrees his Indian appellation was silently omitted” (150). Retaining only the names, religion, and culture of his white parents, the “Indian” child becomes, in effect, white, despite any biological claims to “mixed” race. Though many white Americans regarded African Americans as “beyond the reach of mixture” (as Thomas Jefferson famously claimed), the belief

⁴² Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (New York: W. W Norton and Company, 1986), 228-229.

that Indians could – and ought – be assimilated into white society was rather common in the early republic.⁴³ Charles Hobomok’s ability to “become” white (i.e., that his rearing and education develop as if he were “fully” biologically white), also allow the retention of his mother’s (cultural) whiteness. An ultimately redeemable heroine, and potential prototype for the white republican mother, Mary Conant, at the very least, reproduces the culturally-white family.

Unlike Jemison, Mary Conant is therefore able to contribute to the (future) reproduction of the nation, both by reproducing a (culturally) white male child and by producing the domestic space of the (culturally-white) home. In effect, *Hobomok* is a precursor to what Lydia Fisher calls antebellum “domestication narratives,” as its ending sufficiently contributes to the project of nation-building that Fisher describes by expelling the “savage” elements of both the child and the woman from the home.⁴⁴ The child this Mary raises will produce descendants who Child’s readers can easily imagine constituting the early republic. Jemison’s narrative, on the other hand, tells not only of her “mixed-blooded” children, but places special emphasis on the violent deaths of her sons, (Thomas and Jesse are murdered by their brother John, who is later murdered, as well) while telling surprisingly little of the kin who survive her (Jemison’s three surviving daughters and thirty-nine grandchildren.)

Hobomok offers an early narrative of “domestication” in the two senses that Amy Kaplan discusses in her dual understanding of the “domestic” as referring to both the nuclear family home and the imperially-expanding American nation. In this understanding, the figure of the white woman becomes essential for maintaining boundaries between the domestic and the foreign, understood as boundaries of racial, as well as cultural difference. Mary Conant

⁴³ Thomas Jefferson *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. David Waldstreicher (1787; reprint New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s Press, 2002), 181. The irony of Jefferson’s public claims against “amalgamation” between whites and blacks has, of course, been revealed by scholars such as Annette Gordon Reed. See her *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997.)

⁴⁴ Lydia Fisher, “The Savage in the House,” *Arizona Quarterly* 64.1 (Spring 2008): 50.

successfully maintains these boundaries as she is divorced from Hobomok and her son is incorporated into white colonial society. Jemison, though, narrates a “white woman” who continually refuses to maintain such boundaries of race, culture, or nation. The relationship between Jemison and the two African American men for whom she harvests corn is a domestic relation as well as a relation of exchanged labor: Jemison, unable to build a home for herself and her children before the arrival of what was a historically harsh winter, remains with them in their cabin until she can build a home for herself and her children. She relates that “deprived of a house, and without the means of building one in season, after I had finished my husking, and having found from the short acquaintance which I had had with the negroes, that they were kind and friendly, I concluded, at their request, to take up my residence with them for a while in their cabin, till I should be able to provide a hut for myself” (105-106). Not only do we see the irony that Jemison does not need protection from the Indians, but that she and her children live for a time in the same cabin as two black men explodes the trope of the vulnerable white woman in her narrative and reinscribes the bounds of domesticity around a decidedly “interracial” space.

While most writers who discuss Jemison pay little attention to this period of her narrative, the significance of these events is duly noted by G. Peter Jemison, in his epilogue to Rayna M. Gangi’s 1996 novelization of Mary Jemison’s story. I quote G. Peter Jemison at length, as his comments most appropriately address the significance of this part of Mary Jemison’s story. He writes,

Mary survived the terrible winter of 1779-80 because of two escaped slaves and their generosity. She and her five children were given refuge in the home of these two African-Americans, within Seneca territory, beyond the reach of the American Army and its path of total destruction. The irony of African slaves believing they are protecting a white woman from the Senecas, when it is the American Army that she is fleeing, could not have been imagined by a Hollywood writer.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ G. Peter Jemison, in Rayna M. Gangi, *Mary Jemison: White Woman of the Seneca: a novel*, 152. It is worth noting that much is made of this particularly “ironic” episode in Jemison’s narrative in both Gangi’s and Deborah

Mary Jemison's inability – or perhaps her refusal – to keep “foreign” or “savage” (i.e., non-white) elements outside the home might result in too-easily designating this episode as just another “failure” of (white republican) mothering. On the other hand, the winter of 1779-80 presents an extraordinary example of the domestic virtue by which Jemison is so closely characterized in Seaver's introduction, and one which he categorically associates with her whiteness – hospitality.

Seaver writes, “Although her bosom companion was an ancient Indian warrior, and notwithstanding her children and associates were all Indians, yet it was found that she possessed an uncommon share of hospitality, and that her friendship was well worth courting and preserving” (54). Seemingly, Jemison's whiteness is that which allows her the capacity for this exceptional virtue of domesticity – a capacity that Seaver implies might have otherwise been inhibited by her familiar and familial associations with Indians. While Seaver tells us that “Many still live to commemorate her benevolence towards them when prisoners during the war, and to ascribe their deliverance to the mediation of ‘The White Woman,’” the narrative that follows does not mark such hospitality as an expressly “white” – or “woman's” quality (54). It does, however, resemble the hospitality she receives in the cabin of the two self-emancipated men who help shelter and sustain her and her children. We read further in Seaver's introduction that “Her house was the stranger's home; from her table the hungry were refreshed . . . She was the protectress of the homeless fugitive, and made welcome the weary wanderer” (54). Once a “stranger” among the Indians, and given a home; and made a “homeless fugitive,” and a “weary wanderer” by the Continental Army before being taken into an African American domestic space in which she and her children could be supported, this brand of hospitality is not merely a “white

Larsen's novelizations of Mary Jemison's life. See Gangi, 71-80 and Deborah Larsen, *The White*, (New York: Random House, 2002), 152-161, 165. My epigraphs come from these two novels.

woman's" virtue, but the empathetic result of Jemison's experience with people who are willing to grant hospitality across "racial" lines.

Just as Jemison's hospitality, too, is granted across lines of "race" or "culture," so is her sympathy, the characteristically "feminine" quality that becomes most prominent in United States women's fiction of the antebellum period, but which has clear roots in both the captivity narrative and the frontier romance. While the lessons Jemison's narrative gives us from her biological mother are mostly imperatives to retain her language and religion, her Seneca mother directs her children in sympathy, here presented as a feminine quality of feeling. When one of Jemison's sisters wants to bring her to watch the public execution of prisoners, their mother chides her biological daughter, warning against taking Jemison to see a scene that might deepen her sadness at losing her biological family. Here Jemison's mother, though Seneca, serves as a fitting example of feminine sympathy more typically attributed to white women – the same sympathy for the "stranger" that Seaver holds as exceptional in Jemison, and (though implicitly) attributes to her capacity as a *white* woman.

As in the narrative's separation of Jemison's relationship with Hiokatoo from his career as a warrior, this scene with Jemison's "Indian mother" removes war from the women's realm. Their mother argues, "Our task is quite easy at home, and our business needs our attention. With war we have nothing to do: our husbands and brothers are proud to defend us, and their hearts beat with ardor to meet our proud foes. Oh! Stay then, my daughter; let our warriors alone perform on their victims the customs of war!" (92). War is clearly designated as masculine here. Further, Jemison tells us that "This speech of our mother had the desired effect; we stayed at home and attended to domestic concerns" (92). This dichotomy between men's "customs of war" and women's "domestic concerns" resembles the familiar instruction of "separate spheres,"

but with the danger of engagement in war being attributed not to maleness, but Indianness, as in Seaver's discussion of Hiokatoo. In the scene with Jemison's mother and sister, as in the episode with her brother, Jemison's Seneca kinship relations seem at the surface to reinforce familiar rhetorics of (white) womanhood even though their narrative origins are in Indian kinship relations. Attributing Jemison's qualities to the bio-logic of her position as "the white woman," then, denies these more complex kinship relations at play in her narrative. If Jemison learns something of hospitality and sympathy from the two African American men with whom she and her children share a home, or from her Seneca mother who is so mindful of her sensitivity, these lessons in virtue cannot simply be attributed to the "cultural whiteness" that Tawil argues she retains. Rather, the "Anglo-American household" that Jemison fails/refuses to produce seems to result not from a cultural difference from her own children, but from her cultural *resemblance to* the Seneca community to which both she and her family belong.

Mary Jemison constructs her home through her family and her proximity to them. At the time of her captivity, Jemison regarded herself as "without a home to go to, even if I could be liberated" because of the loss of her family (70). Later, on the occasion of her adoption, she is "provided with a home" (78) and her understanding of the very concept "home" ultimately comes to encompass the family relations she has formed, as she explains, "with them was my home; my family was there" (83). This home also has as its referent a geographically-located domestic space, most easily located in the space of Gardow Flats in Jemison's narrative. Even as she leaves the cabin of the African American men, she takes up this space as her home for most of the rest of her life: "As that land became my own in a few years, by virtue of a deed from the Chiefs of the Six Nations, I have lived there from that to the present time" (106). On this land, Jemison hid in another cabin from the Dutchman who would separate her from her family, and it

is part of this land that George Jemison stole from her, having already obtained much help from Jemison on the pretense that he was a cousin related to her by her white relatives. The land at Gardow is where Jemison and her daughters farmed to feed their family, where she became known to her neighbors as “the White Woman,” and what she ultimately had to leave to live out her remaining days at the Buffalo Creek Reservation as the frontier of Jemison’s narrative became more heavily-populated by white settlers. Jemison’s relation to this frontier which remains, for her, a domestic rather than a foreign space, reflects her relations to her Indian family. Accordingly, her narrative presents hers as a position of cultural belonging that is not contained by the bio-logic of her racial construction.

Mary Jemison’s enduring appellation as “the White Woman of the Genesee” signifies the complications inherent in the meeting of Western and non-Western kinship systems on the early republican frontier. As can be seen in the prioritization of Western bio-logic in both federal Indian law and the frontier romance, this logic proves insufficient for explaining modes of identification that correspond with non-biological kinship relations. A more sophisticated understanding Jemison’s identification as Indian – deriving from her cultural relations to her Indian family members – recognizes the capacity of a cultural logic of kinship to transcend racial difference. This transcendence is evidence of the constructed nature of race, and can be read through the symbiosis of racial and national formation in the frontier novels discussed here. Jemison’s prioritization of cultural modes of belonging signifies not only the prioritization of bio-logic in continually representing her as “the White Woman,” but illuminates the limitations of this logic. The failure to recognize these limitations results in a failure to recognize the importance of kinship relations for figuring identity – an importance that becomes apparent in a closer examination of Cooper’s, Sedgwick’s and Child’s novels. Mary Jemison’s cabin – the one

she shares with the two African American men, or where she hides from the Dutchman set on redeeming her, or that in which she and her Seneca family reside during their years at Gardow – serves as a space for more appropriately refiguring “the White Woman” within the “interracial” kinship relations and domestic spaces of Jemison’s narrative. The chapter that follows further examines the “interracial” kinship relations formed through sexual kinship – and accompanying national anxieties about the “mingling” of race in certain domestic relations – in antebellum literary culture.

Chapter Two

Blackface Desdemona; or, the White Woman “Begrimed”

I'll have some proof. Her name, that was as fresh
As Dian's visage, is now begrimed and black
As mine own face. If there be cords, or knives,
Poison, or fire, or suffocating streams,
I'll not endure it. Would I were satisfied!

William Shakespeare, *Othello*, Act III, Scene 3, lines 386-390

My name is Desdemona. The word, Desdemona, means misery. It means ill-fated. It means doomed.

Toni Morrison, *Desdemona*

In the last act of Shakespeare's play, Othello laments that Desdemona's "name that was as fresh/As Dian's visage, is now begrimed and black/As mine own face."⁴⁶ Othello counts Desdemona's supposed infidelity as that which "begrimes" her, but the metaphor of comparison with his own complexion was undoubtedly significant for nineteenth-century interpreters of the play who would read Americanized racial blackness in Othello's "complexion." John Quincy Adams, in his reading of the play, wrote that "the great moral lesson of the tragedy of *Othello*, is that black and white blood cannot be intermingled in marriage without a gross outrage upon the law of Nature; and that, in such violations, Nature will vindicate her laws."⁴⁷ For readers or audiences who, like Adams, would regard the interracial marriage plot as an inherent problem, Desdemona is "begrimed" not by this false charge of adultery, but by the very fact of her

⁴⁶ William Shakespeare, *Othello*, 5.3.386-388. Further references to *Othello* will be given parenthetically in the text.

⁴⁷ See John Quincy Adams' discussion in "Misconceptions of Shakespeare Upon the Stage," *Notes and Comments upon Certain Plays and Actors of Shakespeare, with Criticism and Correspondence*, ed. James Henry Hackett, 3rd ed. (1836; reprint. New York: Carelton, 1864), 224. James H. Dormon, Jr. takes Adams' reading of the play as evidence of the common understanding of *Othello* as an "anti-miscegenation play" in the nineteenth-century United States. See his discussion in *Theater in the Antebellum South, 1815-1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 276-277.

marriage to Othello – a marriage that would have been prohibited by many of the states in which *Othello* was performed throughout the nineteenth- and early-twentieth centuries.

Unsurprisingly, nineteenth-century American productions of *Othello* played upon racialized readings of Othello's blackness, with the titular role most often performed by a white actor in some form of blackface. These blackface renditions, like other blackface performance, perpetuated derogatory stereotypes of African Americans. They also illustrated popular white anxieties regarding racial transfer in the literal "begriming" of the initially "white" Desdemona. Audience accounts convey what might be expected: by the end of the play, Othello's "blackening" makeup had inevitably rubbed off onto Desdemona's "white" face and clothes. In Junius Brutus Booth's performances of Othello, William Winter recounts that "on one occasion, having no black stockings, he blackened his legs as well as his face and hands, and thereby, in the course of the performance, soiled the white dress of the fair Desdemona."⁴⁸

Another assessment of the habitual performance of Othello in blackface notes blacking makeup's "many disadvantages: particularly in coming off inconveniently and being transferable from hand to hand; oftentimes they were seen to touch nothing they did not soil; let it be *Desdemona's* dress or even her cheek, or the handkerchief with which, in moments of forgetfulness, in the whirlwind of their passion they dabbed their brows."⁴⁹ It is in this context of the literal transfer of Othello's blackness to Desdemona – and in the metaphor of its potential for racial/sexual "begriming" – that Othello and Desdemona so easily became central literary tropes for discourses of interracial heterosexuality in the United States. Simply put, Desdemona's "begriming" literalizes white racist anxieties about interracial sex.

⁴⁸ William Winter, "Shakespeare on the Stage: Fourth Paper: Othello," *The Century Magazine* Vol. 82, ed. Richard Watson Gilder (May to October, 1911): 512.

⁴⁹ "Othello's Costume," *Once a Week*, Vol. II (June-December, 1866) London: Bradbury, Evans, & Co., 1866. (September 8, 1866): 274.

While most nineteenth-century discussions of white womanhood – like that of Mary Jemison – insist upon white women’s biological, unchangeable whiteness, when white women are figured in interracial sexual relations, the stakes of whiteness’ supposed permanency changes. The “begriming” of Desdemona illustrates how the rhetorical whiteness of white women was, in nineteenth-century discourses, imagined to be threatened by sexual encounters with African American men in particular. This literal image of the possible transfer of race is paradoxical in its reliance upon essentialized notions of racial difference, while simultaneously enacting racist ideology that reveals race’s construction. I use the example of Desdemona here in order to examine how nineteenth-century beliefs about interracial sex came to bear on understandings of white womanhood.⁵⁰

Because racial hierarchies of the pre- and post-Civil War nineteenth-century are dependent upon the preservation of imagined biological racial difference, “interracial” sexual relations like those contained in the cultural tropes of Othello and Desdemona pose a threat to the hegemonic white culture. Such depictions and the accompanying social and legal restrictions on such relations are informed by assumptions not only about blackness or even the “interracial” figure of the “tragic mulatto/a,” but also by how the figure of the “white woman” is constructed around and within these images of “interracial” heterosexuality. Assumptions surrounding the figure of the “white woman” inform nineteenth-century depictions of interracial sexual mixture, which in turn contribute to the construction of white womanhood. Accounts of nineteenth-century performances of *Othello*, personal narratives of interracial marriages, writings promoting interracial mixture, and “anti-amalgamation” or “anti-miscegenation” literature all work to figure

⁵⁰ For a discussion of the various, and sometimes contradictory, uses of Desdemona as an icon of (white) womanhood, see Edward Kahn, “Desdemona and the Role of Women in the Antebellum North,” *Theater Journal* 60.2 (May 2008): 235-255.

interracial sexual relations in the American imagination, placing the figure of the white woman at the center of white anxieties about racial integration and intermixture.

These anxieties belong to the realm of “sexual kinship,” the relation by which non-biological kinship relations might be established (regardless of legal marital status) and by which some interracial kinship ties are created. The heterosexual relation on which I focus (because of its prominence in nineteenth-century American discourses of race and sexuality) is a relation of kinship, in its potential to create interracial biological family. The possibility of the literal transfer of race – from black and brown men to white women – underlies white anxieties about interracial sex. This essay examines the ideologies by which interracial heterosexual relations have the potential to racially refigure white women participants. The literary notion of “figuring” emphasizes the way race works in these narratives to position characters in their respective narrative genres – genres which have the potential to change as their characters are re-racialized and thereby “figure” differently for their respective stories.

This chapter is invested, primarily, in nineteenth-century depictions of and reactions to interracial sex, and particularly the hyper-visible relation between black men and white women.⁵¹ The first of these discussions examines such refigurations of white femininity which evoke literal and rhetorical un-whitenings – moves by which whiteness is evacuated, and sometimes replaced with differently-raced content – revealing the constructed nature of white womanhood in the mid-nineteenth century American imagination. I focus here on the dominant

⁵¹ Martha Hodes’ *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* offers a case-study history of relationships between black men and white women in the South, a relation she argues shifts from the antebellum to the post-Civil War period. Other texts invested in accounts of interracial kinship relations in the nineteenth-century United States include Hodes, *The Sea Captain’s Wife: A True Story of Love, Race, and War in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007) and *Sex, Love, Race: Crossing Boundaries in North American History* (New York: New York University Press, 1999); Joshua D. Rothman, *Notorious in the Neighborhood: Sex and Families Across the Color Line in Virginia, 1787-1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Cassandra Jackson, *Barriers Between Us: Interracial Sex in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004).

representation of interracial sexual kinship in the images of Othello and Desdemona. In this discussion I note the prevalence of this couple in the nineteenth-century imagination and examine how Desdemona is understood to be “blackened” both in metaphors of the interraciality of sexual kinship and – more literally – on the American blackface minstrel stage.

First, I will discuss how nineteenth-century American tropes of white womanhood are dependent upon assumptions about the transfer of (biologically construed) race via heterosexual sex. Next, I examine nineteenth-century American notions of Desdemona’s whiteness, via John Quincy Adams’ readings of her interracial heterosexuality as effectively re-racing Desdemona. Moving to a discussion of mid- to late-century minstrel stagings of *Othello*, I read two plays in which Desdemona’s whiteness is literally refigured in blackface performance. I conclude with a brief discussion of Toni Morrison’s play, *Desdemona*, and its accompanying potential for re-thinking Desdemona’s interracial kinship ties beyond her relation to Othello.

“Tupping your White Ewe”: the White Woman and Sexual Kinship

The figure of the white woman in an interracial sexual relation is located at the intersection of slavery, abolitionism, and racial mixture. Images of white women are often dependent upon their assumed sexual and racial “purity.” This notion of purity, however, is constructed against the backdrop of depictions of interracial sex, particularly in the hyper-visible relation between black men and white women symbolized by Othello and Desdemona.⁵² The

⁵² Martha Hodes’ *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) offers a case-study history of relationships between black men and white women in the South, a that relation she argues shifts from the antebellum to the post-Civil War period. Other texts invested in accounts of interracial kinship relations in the nineteenth-century United States include Hodes, *The Sea Captain’s Wife: A True Story of Love, Race, and War in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007) and *Sex, Love, Race: Crossing Boundaries in North American History* (New York: New York University Press, 1999); Joshua D. Rothman, *Notorious in the Neighborhood: Sex and Families Across the Color Line in Virginia, 1787-1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Cassandra Jackson, *Barriers Between*

visibility of this relation was not unthinkable in the nineteenth century. On the contrary, it was reiterated to the point of obsession in the national psyche. Nineteenth-century American iterations of *Othello* emphatically and deliberately demonize the image of the black male, figuring him as a perpetual threat not only to white women, but also to racial definition of white “purity” and, therefore, to the American racial hegemony itself. Documents from Edward William Clay’s 1839 caricatures of racial mixture to David Croly’s 1864 hoax pamphlet, “Miscegenation: the theory of the blending of the races, applied to the American white man and Negro,” demonstrate that racial mixture was widely-viewed as a threat to whiteness and, especially, to white womanhood.⁵³ This is remarkably clear in Josiah Nott’s warning of “probable extermination of the two races if the Whites and Blacks are allowed to intermarry,” which regarded racial mixture as threatening the very existence of white people.⁵⁴ Women are particularly implicated in this threat of extermination, as the burden of literally reproducing whiteness lies in the impetus to bear white children.

In addition to placing white women at the center of national concerns about the reproduction of whiteness, another result of these depictions of interracial sexual relations is that the reality of physical and psychological threats to black bodies in the enslavement and lynching of black men is masked in the literary figuring of the “white woman” trope. Further, the incendiary, though no less emphatic, effect of this imagining is the erasure of black women from the equation of interracial sexual kinship – particularly in their victimization by white men (often men who are also their enslavers), figured here only as the chivalric protectors of white

Us: Interracial Sex in Nineteenth-Century American Literature (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004).

⁵³ See Edward William Clay’s *Practical Amalgamation* series, including “Musical Soirée,” “The Wedding,” “An Amalgamation Waltz,” and “The Fruits of Amalgamation” (which I will discuss later), 1839, and David Goodman Croly and George Wakeman’s anonymously published pamphlet, *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and Negro*, 1863.

⁵⁴ See Josiah C. Nott, “The Mulatto a Hybrid – probable extermination of the two races if the Whites and Blacks are allowed to intermarry,” *The American Journal of the Medical Sciences*. VI (1843):252-256.

womanhood. Positing white women only as would-be victims of interracial sexual violence also renders moot the fact of voluntary interracial sexual relations between black men and white women, evacuating these white women's sexual decisions, nonwhite kinship ties, and sometimes even marital legitimacy from interracial couplings.

Assumptions about race, gender, and sexuality position the literary and cultural figure of the "white woman" as particularly vulnerable to racial marking through interracial heterosexual sex. Women are subject to the potential of a physical record of their interracial sexual experiences, as susceptible to impregnation and the possibility of bearing visibly-racially-mixed children. In addition to this material evidence of racial mixture, however, the "white woman" is also susceptible to forms of social racial marking. Interracial sexual relations threaten claims to normative models of white femininity, placing these women in domestic relations that are incongruous with national models of family and citizenship. This discussion of interracial sexual relations addresses the contradictions between the literary representations discussed and assumptions about the figure of the "white woman" at work behind popular discussions of interracial heterosexuality.

Because women are susceptible to bearing visibly-racially-mixed children, theories of race and heterosexuality applied to interracial sexual relations can be viewed as a kind of interracial sexual kinship. In the sexual kinship relation (sometimes – but not necessarily – also a relation of legal marriage), the couple is joined in kinship through their actual or potential progeny. In popular nineteenth-century American constructions, heterosexuality denotes the racial-marking by which race is understood to be transferred from black men (who "have" and "give" race) to white women (who "receive" it). In order to understand the imagined transfer of race in this ideology, one must regard this transfer not as metaphorical but literal, located in the

transfer of semen, understood as the origin of shared kin as well as a potential origin for biologically-construed notions of race.

When race is viewed in the biological terms upon which nineteenth-century understandings are dependent, the position of “interracial” motherhood involves literally containing – perhaps a form of embodying – the racial Other. As parents are believed to transfer race to their children in imagined quantities of “black” or “white” “blood,” the women who might bear these children also receive the “content” of race through heterosexual sex. A 1799 study by Benjamin Rush evidences such anxieties regarding the literal transfer of race through sexual relations. He describes “a white woman in North Carolina not only acquired a dark color, but several of the features of a negro, by marrying and living with a black husband. A similar instance of a change in the color and features of a woman in Bucks county in Pennsylvania has been observed and from a similar cause. In both of these cases, the women bore children by their black husbands.”⁵⁵ Rush’s scientific supposition about the blackness of skin calls us to take seriously beliefs about race that would today seem archaic. I don’t, of course, mean to validate Rush’s theories of scientific racism here, but only to offer this as an example, showing that white anxieties about the possible transfer of race were seriously-held (however misguided) beliefs.

Rush’s argument construes race (i.e., blackness) as contagion – and sexually-transmitted contagion at that. In Rush’s presentation of white women who have become black as a result of sex and reproduction with black men, we can see the transfer of race from Othello to Desdemona as not only metaphorical, but literal, as pointing to the materiality of race. Race becomes, in Rush’s scenario, something contained in the offspring of these interracial couples. Through the acts of conceiving and carrying a child who is understood to be differently-raced from

⁵⁵ See Rush “Observations Intended to Favour a Supposition that the Black Color (as it is called) of the Negroes is Derived from Leprosy,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 4 (1799): 294.

themselves, these white women incorporate the racial Other into their own bodies. If the white woman is capable of “receiving” and “containing” race in this way, she becomes racially malleable, in a sense. That is, she can become Other, herself, as her proximity to (and perhaps, her inextricability from) the blackness embodied in her child (or potential children) renders her own whiteness precarious. In the context of this understanding of racial transfer, Othello and Desdemona’s final scene becomes an easily-adopted metaphor for the “dangers” of racial mixture.

American renditions of *Othello* are mired in the long history of performing *Othello* in blackface. Although there were all-African-American productions of *Othello* in the nineteenth-century, and some “integrated” productions in which an American Indian played the title role, and although the role of Othello was played in England by Afro-British actors such as Ira Aldridge, Othello was not played by a black man with an accompanying white cast in the United States until Paul Robeson’s groundbreaking – and controversial – performance in the 1940s. It seems more than likely that this history of performing the role of Othello in blackface and the popularity of blackface minstrelsy contributed to the popularity of this play in nineteenth-century America, and its themes of interracial romance makes it clear why the couple becomes such a central literary and cultural trope.⁵⁶ Othello and Desdemona appeared as icons, literally in the background of depictions of integration and amalgamation, such as Edward William Clay’s 1839 “The Fruits of Amalgamation,” reiterated throughout American literary culture in a relation that conspicuously masks other interracial relations – especially, the rape of enslaved women by their enslavers. (See Figures 4 and 5)

⁵⁶ Marvin McAllister notes that *Othello* was “by far the most popular stage African play in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century United States.” See *White People Do Not Know How to Behave at Entertainments Designed for Ladies and Gentlemen of Color: William Brown’s African and American Theater* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 109.



Figure 4: Edward William Clay, “The Fruits of Amalgamation,” 1839
American Antiquarian Society

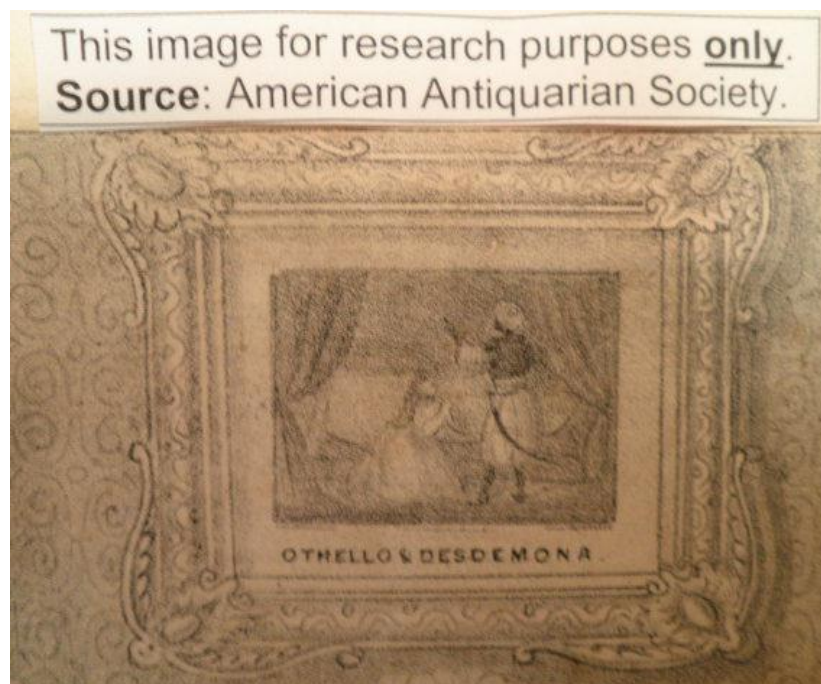


Figure 5: “Othello & Desdemona,” Detail of Edward W. Clay, “The Fruits of Amalgamation”
American Antiquarian Society

Thus, the black man/white woman relation becomes a hypervisible national image through which race and heterosexuality are most often theorized. It is worth noting that the theorization of this instance of interracial sexuality appears alongside a nationally-inflected white male patriarchy that, though absent in these depictions, is implied. As the intended viewer for most representations of interracial sexual relations, the white male is positioned as the would-be protector of white women from black men, who are presented as simultaneous threat to both white feminine virtue and the (white supremacist) American nation. One example of its prominence can be seen in an 1864 political pamphlet denouncing interracial marriage, “What Miscegenation is!, and what we are to Expect, now that Mr. Lincoln is Elected President.” (See Figure 6) The image of Othello and Desdemona underlay the theorization of race in this caricatured couple meant to represent “miscegenation” as undesirable.

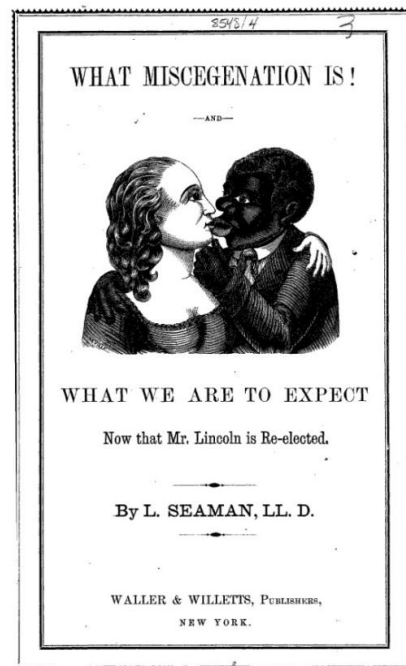


Figure 6: L. Seaman, “What Miscegenation is, and what we are to Expect, now that Mr. Lincoln is Elected President,” (New York: Waller and Willetts [1865?])

A more explicit representation of Othello and Desdemona appears in “The Modern Othello,” a newspaper cartoon from 1863 in which Othello is played by “the Everlastin’ Darkey” and Desdemona by “Columbia,” who he is in the process of smothering with a newspaper. (See Figure 7) It would be impossible to see the “visage” of this fiend-like Othello anywhere other than in this murderous act. Here the nation is identified as, and is meant to identify with, the image of Desdemona/Columbia. As this representation of Shakespeare’s tragic couple suggests, discourses of “miscegenation” became inextricable from suggestions of a national threat by the mid-1860s.

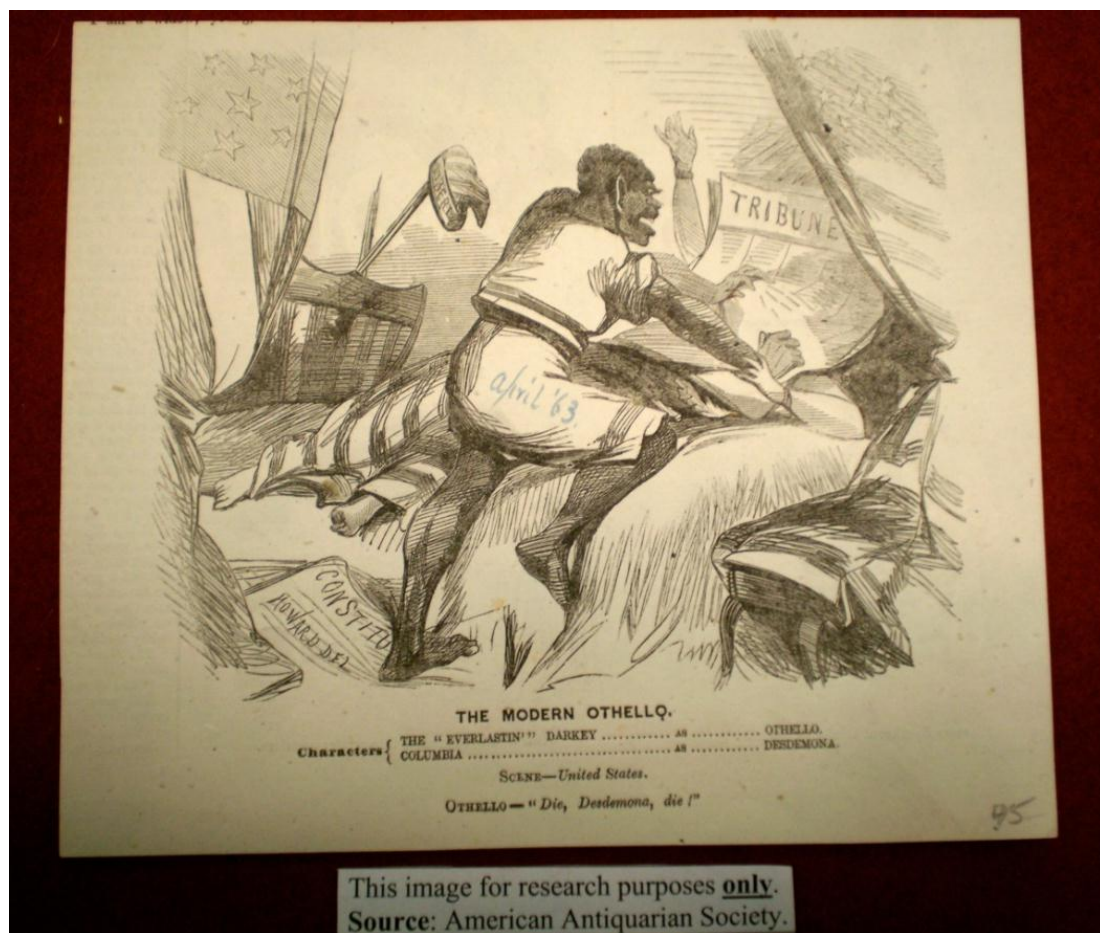


Figure 7: “The Modern Othello,” 1863
American Antiquarian Society

Given the poignancy of images such as these, it is unsurprising that most academic discussions of *Othello* and race in America have focused on theatrical portrayals of Othello himself. Although Shakespeare's tragedy seems to have been generally regarded as an "anti-miscegenation" play by many early nineteenth-century American audiences, the ultimate tragedy of the play did not compensate for the centrality of the interracial marriage plot for some who viewed its content as offensive.⁵⁷ Accordingly, there has been much ado about exactly "how black" Othello should be in its performance. Various arguments were made among nineteenth-century American theatergoers, in particular, that Othello should *not* be cast as "black," but as a lighter-skinned "tawny" Moor; or conversely, that Othello's blackness is central to the content of the play and its tragic ending.⁵⁸

For nineteenth-century American audiences, the question of "how black" Othello ought to be depicted becomes a contentious debate for theater critics. John Quincy Adams serves as one example of a nineteenth-century American participant in this debate, arguing that Othello's blackness is essential to the plot of the play. Whether interracial romance was intended as a central theme for *Othello* became the central debate surrounding arguments as to the degree of Othello's blackness.⁵⁹ James Dorman, for example, discusses the history of Othello appearing in blackface in the antebellum period, noting that "by the end of the ante bellum [sic] period, Othello had to be played as near-white, or not at all" in the South.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ The predominance of popular sentiment against interracial sexual relations in the nineteenth-century United States, rather than rendering *Othello*'s popularity inexplicable, suggest that the play was not generally viewed as supporting interracial marriage or sexual relations, but that Shakespeare's play was tragic, in part, as a result of this "unnatural" relation. I discuss this further below, with regard to John Quincy Adams' reading of the play as racial tragedy.

⁵⁸ Ania Loomba recounts the critical history that attempts to distinguish whether Othello ought be understood as "more or less 'African'/black than 'Turkish'/Muslim" in *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 92.

⁵⁹ See John Quincy Adams' discussion in "Misconceptions of Shakespeare Upon the Stage," 217-228.

⁶⁰ See James A. Dorman, *Theater in the Antebellum South, 1815-1861* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 277.

Further, lines with racial connotations were sometimes excised from the text in American productions. Some omissions center around Iago's early attempt to horrify Brabantio with the image of Othello and Desdemona having sex: "Even now, now, very now, an old black ram/Is tupping your white ewe;" "you'll have your daughter cover'd with a Barbary horse;" and "Your daughter and the Moor are now . . . making the beast with two backs." (1.1.88-89, 110-111, 115-117).⁶¹ The nineteenth-century whitening of Othello in American productions suggests the tension between American audiences' fascination with the coupling of sexual and racial themes, and their investment in biological and social rhetorics of racism that render interracial marriage as "unnatural."

Racial Marking; or, Desdemona "Begrimed and Black as Mine Own Face"

Historically, Othello's blackness – an image that has garnered more attention from literary and theater critics than Desdemona's contrasting whiteness – has taken various forms (the differences between which should be noted): Othello's racially-caricatured appearance in nineteenth-century blackface performances and, rather recently, Sir Laurence Olivier's (arguably unwatchable) 1965 film performance; in nineteenth-century European productions in which Othello was sometimes played by Afro-British or African actors and Paul Robeson's groundbreaking New York performance in 1943; and in Patrick Stewart's 1997 performance of Othello in a "photonegative" casting in which Stewart, happily, did not appear in blackface, and all other parts were played by black actors.⁶² (See Figure 8)

⁶¹ For more on these omissions, see James Andreas, "Othello's African-American Progeny," *South Atlantic Review* 57 (1992): 39-57; 41. The bestiality implied in these images is also significant. As Winthrop Jordan notes, they connect the racialized imagery of the play to notions of "the sexuality of beasts and the bestiality of sex." See Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 38.

⁶² The use of the word "photonegative" to describe this casting seems to originate in Miranda Johnson-Haddad's program notes for the fall 1997 production at the Washington Shakespeare Theater. For more on the casting and



Figure 8: Patrick Stewart as Othello and Patrice Johnson as Desdemona
The Shakespeare Theater, Washington D.C., 1997,
<<http://www.thepsn.org/psn/playtitle.asp?playid=19>>

further discussion of this production, see Denise Albanese, "Black and White, and Dread All Over: The Shakespeare Theater's "Photonegative" *Othello* and the Body of Desdemona," in *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. Dymphna Callaghan, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 226-247.

In this last image, I am less interested in Stewart as a white(washed) Othello, or even with this production's insistence on maintaining racial dualism as essential to the performance, than I am with the portrayal of Desdemona as black. Moreover, what does it mean to render Desdemona "black"? This question is broached, if not answered, on the nineteenth-century American stage. From the images of Desdemona reproduced here, it should be clear that the "blackness" presented by white actors in blackface and that represented by black actors is emphatically *not* the same. My discussion of Desdemona as "begrimed" (that is, in blackface or as "blackened") must acknowledge this difference, the nature of which I will elaborate below.

To think of Desdemona as (figuratively or literally) "black," necessitates thinking about how, particularly in the nineteenth-century American context, Othello inflects upon actual African American or Afro-British women who, though not represented here, are implied, or alluded to, in the blackening of Desdemona.⁶³ One might find, as Toni Morrison discusses, an "Africanist presence" behind Desdemona, in this suggestion of black womanhood.⁶⁴ The rac(ial)ist figuring of Desdemona's whiteness as sexually "pure" is accompanied by the implication of black womanhood as "impure," or "begrimed" in their implied sexual availability. Desdemona's begriming is a besmirching of character that we might attribute more to the perception of Desdemona than her actual character – just as the racist positioning of black women as over-sexualized, and therefore subject to sexual violation is dependent upon racist ideologies rather than the nature or practices of black women, themselves.

Accompanying nineteenth-century discussions of Othello's blackness is a discussion of Desdemona's "whiteness," and this racial designation is, of course, strongly encoded with

⁶³ The relevance of black women to the Othello narrative can also be seen in Djanet Sears's play, *Harlem Duet*, which imagines a possible "backstory" in the American context for Othello, via the triangular relationship between black women, black men, and white women and in Toni Morrison's *Desdemona Project*, which I discuss later.

⁶⁴ See Morrison's discussion in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness in the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage, 1993).

notions of genteel femininity and sexual and racial “purity.” As Iago tells Brabantio that “Even now, now, very now, an old black ram/Is tupping your white ewe,” (Shakespeare 1.1. 90-91) the urgency of the repetition places Othello, the “old black ram,” as the active “tupper,” if you will, while hiding Desdemona’s agency in the sentence’s predicate. In the animalization of Othello in this early scene and in Brabantio’s accusations of his having “enchanted” Desdemona with “foul charms,” (1.2.63,73) Desdemona’s supposedly “unnatural” love for him is explained. This image of Othello as a sexual/racial threat to a potentially innocent white woman victim contributed to the horror of racist audiences and to arguments for Othello being played “less black,” or at the very least, by a “white” actor in blackface, as the layering of this racial performance served to buffer the implications of actual “miscegenation.”

This simple dualism of threat and victim is not the only popular reading of *Othello*, of course, even in the nineteenth century. Some of the most striking commentary on the character of Desdemona might be represented by the writings of John Quincy Adams, then a former United States President.⁶⁵ Adams’ “Misconceptions of Shakespeare on the Stage” published in *New England Magazine* in 1835 and “The Character of Desdemona” in *American Monthly Magazine* in 1836 (both republished in James Hackett’s *Notes and Comments Upon Certain Plays and Actors of Shakespeare* in 1863) align themselves emphatically with the camp that holds Othello’s blackness as essential to Shakespeare’s plot. I’ll repeat Adams’ assessment of the play’s racial drama: “the great moral lesson of the tragedy of *Othello*, is that black and white blood cannot be intermingled in marriage without a gross outrage upon the law of Nature; and that, in such violations, Nature will vindicate her laws.”⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Adams served as president from 1825 to 1829. These writings on Shakespeare appeared in print during the decade after he left office, and (interestingly) just before he argued on behalf of the African captives in the *U.S. v. Amistad* Supreme Court case in 1841.

⁶⁶ Adams, “Misconceptions of Shakespeare Upon the Stage,” 224.

In this discussion, Adams does not simply conflate Othello's blackness with his tragic jealousy and rage, nor does he designate Desdemona as a mere passive victim of interracial violence. Instead, paying attention to the moments in which one might view Desdemona as most empowered, he turns to her "elopement from her father's house" and "clandestine marriage," claiming that she "made the first advances" in their relationship by giving undue attention to Othello's "braggart story" and that her defense of Cassio, too, is inappropriate, as "it is not for female delicacy to extenuate the crimes of drunkenness and bloodshed, even when performing the appropriate office of raising the soul-subduing voice for mercy."⁶⁷ Desdemona's sexuality, Adams holds, is "indelicate."

Importantly, Adams' fiercest critique of Desdemona focuses on her agency in choosing to marry Othello. He acknowledges Desdemona's passion, though marks it as "*unnatural*, solely and exclusively because of [Othello's] color" and argues that, while not false to her husband, "she has been false to the purity and delicacy of her sex and condition when she married him."⁶⁸ Desdemona's transgression, according to Adams, is not merely her elopement (she cannot be compared to Juliet or Miranda, who he writes are driven by "pure love") but Desdemona's "unnatural passion; it cannot be named with delicacy" and her death, he argues, are a result of thus being "deficient in delicacy."⁶⁹ In this racist reading, Desdemona's alleged "unnatural" preference for a black man marks her name and her character by this relation. *Mirror* editor and writer, George Pope Morris attaches this preference to the "New York Desdemonas," white

⁶⁷ Adams, "Misconceptions of Shakespeare Upon the Stage," 224, 245. It should be noted that, though Adams gives a rather extremely unfavorable characterization of Desdemona, there were nineteenth-century critics who wrote more positively about this character. Mrs. (Anna) Jameson's discussion "On the character of *Desdemona*," in *Characteristics of Women, Moral, Poetical, and Historical*, Second American Edition (New York: John Wiley, 1833) is one example of a positive characterization of Desdemona.

⁶⁸ Adams, "The Character of Desdemona," *Notes and Comments upon Certain Plays and Actors of Shakespeare, with Criticism and Correspondence*, ed. James Henry Hackett, 3rd ed. (1836; reprint. New York: Carelton, 1864), 246 and "Misconceptions of Shakespeare Upon the Stage," 225.

⁶⁹ Adams, "The Character of Desdemona," 235, 244.

women theatergoers who he worries may become enamored of other blackface characters, Jim Crow and Gumbo Cuff.⁷⁰

As Tilden Edelstein notes, “Only by seeing Desdemona as wanton and the play as a lesson against racial intermarriage could Adams accept the credibility of even a bleached Othello and a Desdemona who betrays her race and class.”⁷¹ From this particular emphasis on racial difference – that is to say, the importance of race in the heterosexual sexual relation – at stake in this play is the relationship between Desdemona’s racial depiction and her interracial sexual kinship with Othello. These are located both in her sexual passion for Othello and the kinship of their legal marriage and juxtaposed with her racialized difference to Othello in nineteenth-century readings of the play.

As these discussions of Desdemona have it, the effects of interracial marriage come most emphatically to bear on white women who engage in them. Rice’s *Otello* makes this point as it reads the interracial romance plot as inextricable from the story.⁷² T.D Rice’s *Otello* is clearly distinguished from the others, both through his unique minstrel dialect (mockingly parodied by Iago) and by various characters’ continual references to his “black” appearance and use of the epithet “nigger” to describe him. *Otello*’s difference from Desdemona, despite their marriage, is also emphasized, as Rice presents their union as the play’s central problem. The chorus predicts, in the second scene, that “For if a black shall wed a white,/And afterwards go free,/In a very

⁷⁰ See W.T. Lhamon, Jr.’s discussion of Morris in *Jump Jim Crow: Lost Plays, Lyrics, and Street Prose of the First Atlantic Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 20-25.

⁷¹ Tilden G. Edelstein, “*Othello* in America: The Drama of Racial Intermarriage,” *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Van Woodward*, ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 185.

⁷² For a discussion of Rice’s adaptation, and its relation to Shakespeare’s original play and its nineteenth-century models, Gioachino Rossini’s opera *Otello* (1816) and Maurice Dowling’s burlesque, *Othello Travestie* (1834), see W.T. Lhamon, Jr.’s *Jump Jim Crow*, 73-92 and his notes to *Otello, A Burlesque Opera* [1853] in *T.D. Rice: Jim Crow, American. Selected Songs and Plays*, ed. W.T. Lhamon, Jr. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

pretty pickle then/Our daughters soon will be.”⁷³ This “pickle” stems from Desdemona’s infatuation with Othello in Shakespeare’s original, as she “wished/That heaven had made her such a man,” suggesting simultaneously that Desdemona both wished that such a man as Othello was made for her and wishes she was such a man, herself (1.3.164-165). Rice retains this wish in his version, casting it in its racialized terms, as Othello recounts that “Desdemona cocked her ear/and wish Heaben hab made/Her sich a nigger” (120). This sentiment quickly shifts, as Othello continues, “My story being done,/She only wished I had a son” (120). Thus Rice directly addresses the question of Desdemona’s sexual passion for Othello. Answering a commonly-debated question surrounding the play – whether the couple’s marriage is ever consummated – Rice gives Othello and Desdemona a son in his play.⁷⁴

One can easily see how the question of sexual union might be of interest to a nineteenth-century audience preoccupied with the play’s interracial romance plot, and Rice answers this unequivocally, placing the evidence of consummation on stage in the figure of Othello and Desdemona’s child. Remarkably, this child has no lines, and serves no real purpose in the plot of Rice’s adaptation, other than to provide proof of this consummation. When, exactly, the child is conceived is unclear in Rice’s play, as neither this character’s age nor how much time has passed since the couple’s wedding is specified. W.T. Lhamon gives one possibility, however: as Desdemona recounts having swooned from hearing a shocking tale of Othello’s, she comes to “sitting on his knee” and rises up “Greatful,” that is, pregnant (123). Further, the moral of her

⁷³ T. D. Rice, *Otello, A Burlesque Opera*, 117. Further references to *Otello: A Burlesque Opera* will be given parenthetically in the text.

⁷⁴ Celia Daileader discusses the debate surrounding the consummation of Desdemona and Othello’s marriage at length in her chapter on “Offstage Sex and Female Desire” in *Eroticism on the Renaissance Stage Transcendence, Desire, and the Limits of the Visible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 24-49. See also Stephen Greenblatt’s discussion of “the unrepresented consummations of unrepresented marriages” in *Shakespearean Negotiations The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 89.

story, “Never sit on young men’s knees” is given despite Desdemona’s marriage, “though I got a husband by it,” and Desdemona’s pregnancy partially explains the couple’s hurry to wed.⁷⁵

Whether the couple has had intercourse before or only after their marriage is irrelevant, however, to the racist, “anti-miscegenation” reading of the play. The presence of the son is enough to hint at the taboo of interracial sex. The child is listed in the stage directions to the 1853 manuscript simply as “child,” each time accompanying Desdemona. Listed as “Young Otello” in an 1852 playbill and alternately, in an 1846 playbill, as “Master Lorenzo Otello (eldest son of Otello and that there may be no partiality, nature has colored him half and half),” the child’s racial mixture (which here seems to literally draw the line of race down the center of his body), proves his paternity, linking Desdemona to Otello through his presence.⁷⁶ This extraneous character thereby stands in as evidence of the racial “begriming” of Desdemona, as the child’s presence represents the sexual “transfer” of race from Otello to Desdemona, who has borne this racially-mixed child.

While Otello and Desdemona’s child here does not fully embody racial mixture, but maintains the separation of races even in his person, audiences saw here a character other than Otello depicted in blackface on stage, and this character is conceived as a result of Desdemona’s participation in interracial sex. As Rice’s chorus argues in the play’s final scene, “If his wife had but been black,/Instead of white, all had been right.”⁷⁷ Perhaps; but then this would be a very different play. Rice’s presentation of Desdemona’s racially-mixed offspring hints at her literal embodiment of the racial Other in pregnancy. If Desdemona is able to contain blackness in this way, the chorus’ suggestion of a black Desdemona is not unthinkable. While Rice did not go so

⁷⁵ For Lhamon’s argument for this as a possible moment of conception, see Rice, *Otello, A Burlesque Opera*, 175, note 29.

⁷⁶ See Rice, *Otello, A Burlesque Opera*, 176, note 37 and Lhamon’s introduction, xxi, note to Figure 1.

⁷⁷ T.D. Rice, *Otello*, 158.

far as to produce a black Desdemona in his play, other minstrel adaptations of *Othello* did. Rather, like both traditional and minstrel theatrical performances in the nineteenth-century United States exhibited blackface Othellos, these minstrel productions presented blackface Desdemonas. I turn to these particular depictions of Desdemona in the next section.

Blackface Desdemona

Taking even further liberties with *Othello* on the American minstrel stage, the paradigm of black-white/male-female dualism was sometimes complicated by the possibility of characters *other* than Othello – including Desdemona – appearing in blackface. This discussion of minstrel performances of *Othello* will focus on two specific texts: *Othello; A Burlesque, As Performed By Griffin & Christy's Minstrels. At Their Opera House, New York, 1866* and the anonymously-penned *Desdemonum, An Ethiopian Burlesque, in Three Scenes*, published by the Happy Hours Company in 1874 (though both plays were probably performed earlier than these dates) – two productions that extended blackface performance beyond the title role. In the absence of images from minstrel productions of *Othello*, specifically, the image of Rollin Howard, opposite G. W. H. Griffin, also in blackface, reminds us of the significant difference between representing a “black Desdemona” (as we see in the image of Patrice Johnson, playing opposite Patrick Stewart) and a “blackface Desdemona,” (in the depiction of Howard’s “nigger wench” stock character). (See Figure 9) In the latter example, we see a character that might better be viewed as “begrimed” than “black,” with this “begriming” evidencing the rhetorics of white racism employed in these depictions.



Figure 9: Rollin Howard (“wench”) and George W. H. Griffin, c. 1855

Similarly, the English illustration of Othello's final scene from "Treager's Black Jokes" series shows a caricatured version of Desdemona, in which she appears black. (See Figure 10) Here Desdemona does not appear as an actual black woman, but – as in the minstrel stock character of the "nigger wench" and in most nineteenth-century depictions of black people – as a caricature of one. Just as this production is clearly not interested in any realistic representation of an African American woman in this figure, neither are racist readings of the original play interested in realistic representations of the white woman.



Figure 10: William Summers, "Othello Act 5 Scene 2" Tregear's Black Jokes. G. S. Tregear. London: c1828-1832. Folger Shakespeare Library

To read a racial-sexual “begriming” in Desdemona’s relations to Othello is to view a caricatured representation of white womanhood in the figure of a “white” Desdemona. Reading Desdemona as a woman whose sexual purity is inextricable from an understanding of her whiteness (even a whiteness that is impermanent, capable of “begriming” by her proximity to a black man) demands similar assumptions about the relation between race and sexuality required for a reading of black womanhood as sexually promiscuous or as sexually “available” in the absence of her legal status as a person. The representation of Desdemona as a “nigger wench” caricature reveals the transferability of these similarly racist views of black and white womanhood. Simply phrased, both the black and the white caricature originate from the same set of assumptions about race, gender and sexuality.

In Griffin and Christy’s 1866 production, Desdemona was played by George Christy, who was well-known for portraying the kind of “nigger wench” character we see here represented by Howard. I am ultimately interested in exploring the rhetoric of Desdemona’s whiteness still perpetuated in this image, and what becomes of it as it is transformed within the medium of blackface minstrelsy. The first question for these blackface renditions of Desdemona might be: what do we make of Desdemona – and her supposed whiteness – when she appears in blackface? Unsurprisingly, contemporary commentary on minstrel shows has not been as carefully recorded and handed down as commentary on traditional or “high” theatrical productions, such as Adams’ musings on Shakespeare’s original play. Nevertheless, reading the extant manuscripts of these blackface minstrel renditions of *Othello* opens up new ways of reading Desdemona’s race, which is visually represented within the complex rhetorics of the blackface minstrel performance.

Griffin and Christy's burlesque of *Othello* draws upon a practice more common in post-Civil War minstrelsy, the depiction of white-ethnics in blackface.⁷⁸ In this production, Iago is coded as Irish (singing an air entitled "Ireland the Place Is" in the third scene) and adopting an Irish accent in the textual rendition (dropped Gs: darlin', amazin'). Brabantio is represented as German, his dialogue also marked by a distinct accent (my becomes "mine," with becomes "mit," think becomes "tink," etc.).⁷⁹ Interestingly enough, however, neither Othello's nor Desdemona's speech is marked by dialect in this text; their dialogue appears in standard English which in some ways appears as the most "Shakespearean" of the play, much of which is written in rhymed iambic pentameter (sometimes spoken, sometimes sung). Strikingly, Desdemona's accent does not resemble her father's, but Othello's. If marked language is any indication of racial or ethnic designation (and in the minstrel tradition, we see that it often is), Othello and Desdemona are aligned here. Or, if we are to take the marked speech of Iago and Brabantio as designating national or geographic associations, both Othello and Desdemona "belong" in the American South: their early love-duet is sung to the tune of "Dixie," as the happy couple plan their future life together "Away, away, &c." presumably in Dixieland, as the song goes.⁸⁰

Although the fundamental nature of blackface performance often compels scholars to focus on visual rather than linguistic or aural representations of race, Desdemona and Othello's

⁷⁸ William J. Mahar notes the "interchangeability of costumes, props, dialects, and settings" that would alter depictions of race and ethnicity in "Ethiopian Skits and Sketches: Contents and Contexts of Blackface Minstrelsy, 1840-1890" in *Inside the Minstrel mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy*, ed. Annemarie Bean, James V. Hatch, and Brooks McNamara (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 184-185.

⁷⁹ While most literary critics (ranging from George Philip Krapp in the 1920s to Eric Lott and Michael North in the 1990s) have agreed that representations of dialect do more complex work than simply presenting phonetic representations of speech, Eric Lott also mentions "the ease with which the blackface mask accommodated a variety of dialects" in *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 264, n. 6. I am interested in the way these differently-rendered dialects differentiate themselves from Othello and Desdemona's speech in this particular production.

⁸⁰ *Othello; A Burlesque, As Performed By Griffin & Christy's Minstrels. At Their Opera House, New York in This Grotesque Essence: Plays from the American Minstrel Stage*, ed. Gary D. Engle (1866?; reprint, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 71. Further references to *Othello: A Burlesque* will be given parenthetically in the text.

shared blackface appearance in the play is reinforced by this additional linguistic resemblance. This resemblance indicates an alignment of these characters that audiences would have easily perceived, (if only in its difference from standard depictions, on stage and in illustrations, of Desdemona's difference from Othello).⁸¹ A correlation between dialect (here indicating something more akin to geographical origin than race), visual resemblance, and the marital kinship ties of Othello and Desdemona are implied in this production, in a way that standard presentations of *Othello* deny. That is to say, this play aligns Desdemona with Othello in a way that even John Quincy Adams would have been unable to deny.

Despite these complications of linguistic and visual representation, – and perhaps even surprisingly so – the interracial romance plot is still central to this version of *Othello*. Here we might ask: what possibilities does blackface foreclose for Desdemona in this plot? Or, what might blackface allow that her whiteness does not? The end of the Dixie tune marks a potential point of racial difference, as Desdemona sings “I’ll love you dearly all my life,/Although you are a nigger” but the discourse of racial/sexual degradation in amalgamation that is so often read into Shakespeare’s text is largely absent from this version of the story (71). Though Othello is consistently depicted in racist terms, what is missing is any contrasting description of Desdemona. Specifically, the dualistic black-white imagery has been evacuated: there is no “white ewe” to Othello’s “black ram” in this play. A significant textual difference is the final scene, which includes Desdemona’s death, only, with Othello never realizing that Iago’s

⁸¹ What I don’t mean to suggest, though is that we ought make any assumptions about the audience’s potential alignment with the couple on the basis of their standard English alone, or the impossibility of their alignment with either Othello or Desdemona on the basis of their appearance in blackface. Writers such as Eric Lott, in *Love and Theft*, and W. T. Lhamon, in *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998) illustrate this in their respective discussions of white identification with blackface characters.

suggestions of her infidelity were false. The burlesque depicts only the uxoricide, or wife murder, omitting Othello's accompanying suicide.

The absence of any remorse for Desdemona's murder in this play recalls Adams' particularly unsympathetic reading of Desdemona's death, in which we see the full extent of his fear of interracial heterosexuality. Adams writes, "This character [Desdemona] takes from us so much of the sympathetic interest in her sufferings, that when Othello smothers her in bed, the terror and the pity subside immediately into the sentiment that she has her just deserts."⁸² It is impossible, of course, to imagine how close Adams' sentiment might have been to that of Griffin and Christy's audiences, but this play's changed ending, with the unpunished murder of Desdemona, suggests a refusal to sympathize with the heroine akin to that in Adams' essay. Leaving Desdemona's faithfulness to Othello unrevealed de-emphasizes her virtue in marital fidelity, while retaining only the sexual desire with which Adams is so uncomfortable.

The 1874 acting edition of *Desdemonum* differs most evidently from the Griffin & Christy show in its language. There are no white-ethnic coded characters, and the entire cast (here portraying the roles of Desdemonum, Oteller, Iagum, Brabantium, etc.) speak in a similarly inflected minstrel dialect, all deriving from the town of "Wennice." While not distinguishing Othello and Desdemona's dialect as unique to themselves, this version resists what Rice's *Otello* fairly accomplishes – the linguistic segregation of Otello from all other characters. Though the dialect of *Desdemonum* is definitely a racialized one, the absence of this linguistic difference between Othello and the other characters has an equalizing effect.

Despite this shared dialect and the shared blackface appearance, however, blackness signifies racial difference in the play. In Desdemonum's first duet with Oteller, our attention is turned directly to the medium of blackface performance, itself. She proclaims "since burnt-cork

⁸² Adams "Misconceptions of Shakespeare Upon the Stage," 226.

am de fashion, I'll not be behind –/I'll see Oteller's wisage in his highfautin' mind."⁸³ What does it mean, then, for Desdemonum to "put on" the "fashion" of burnt-cork? The text suggests Oteller's blackness is undesirable, as Brabantio argues Oteller has "bewitched her, dat's de matter; come de Hoodoo on de gal./ He's played de black art on her" to explain Desdemonum's attraction (65). Later, he asks if Desdemonum truly owes her faith "To dat Jamaica nig? Why, gal you're blind." To which she replies again, "I see de feller's wisage in his mind;/Beauty's but skin deep anyhow you know" (65). This trivialization of appearance cannot, however, be taken at face value in the context of blackface performance, where appearance always signifies.

In the absence of casting directions, the text of the play still gives evidence of Desdemonum's blackness, "put on" in "burnt-cork . . . fashion," or otherwise.⁸⁴ If Desdemona's affection for Othello's "wisage" is merely "fashionable," what does this say, then, of her sexual desire? Is it the same "unnatural passion" that Adams suggests in his account of her indelicacy? But, how "delicate" could a minstrel-version of Desdemona have possibly been? Desdemonum falls closely in line with the other characters of the play, all of whom seem to have been meant as comical, but a more serious commentary on race might be read in these blackface minstrel renditions.

Joyce Green MacDonald argues that in this play, "a minstrel in drag playing Shakespeare's heroine firmly muzzles the sexual and cross-racial horrors incited by Shakespeare's climax."⁸⁵ As Oteller tells Desdemonum upon their elopement, "De hour am

⁸³ Happy Hours Company, *Desdemonum: An Ethiopian Burlesque, in Three Scenes in This Grotesque Essence: Plays from the American Minstrel Stage*, ed. Gary D. Engle (1874; reprint, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 63. Further references to *Desdemonum* will be given parenthetically in the text.

⁸⁴ Kenneth Gross notes the irony of Desdemona's "blackened up" appearance. See *Shakespeare's Noise* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 103.

⁸⁵ Joyce Green Macdonald, "Acting Black: *Othello*, *Othello* Burlesques, and the Performance of Blackness," *Theatre Journal* 46.2 (May 1994): 243. Desdemona's appearance not only in blackface but in drag is another layer of this play that deserves further examination. White male actors' portrayal of black(face) women on the minstrel stage make the layering of race and gender in these performances even more complex than I have initially described here.

propitious –come, my darling flame!/Dey say dat in de dark, al cullers am de same” (63). This reference to the dark’s homogenization of color immediately preceding the couple’s embrace (an embrace that had to evoke a popular cultural image of Othello and Desdemona, even for those who had not seen the original Shakespearean play) at first seems to be just a slightly-bawdy joke (evoking much less-vivid images of interracial sex than the original text). But read in light of Desdemona’s transformation into Desdemonum (a figure already “begrimed” at the play’s opening), it offers a more complex commentary on amalgamation and a critique of racial dualism.

Kenneth Gross refers to “a bizarrely democratizing quality to the minstrel show” in its trivialization of race as “fashion,” able to be donned by any number of characters.⁸⁶ This gesture toward the theatricality of “putting on” race by putting on blacking makeup reveals the play’s construction of race, even in the original Shakespearean script. When played in blackface even in these “straight” productions, Othello’s blackness is always already constructed and artificial, rather than natural or essential, and as such, it is transferable to any of the other characters. Likewise, Desdemona’s face is, in these productions of blackened Othellos, always in danger of becoming “begrimed and black” through her contact with him. This reveals as much about the whiteness of Desdemona as about the blackness of a minstrelized Othello. Just as Desdemonum’s blackness is “put on,” so is the construction of whiteness with which writers like Adams read Desdemona.

In addition to the homogenization of race, then, we have a homogenization of gender in the blackface productions, which is simply over-layered with performances of race and gender. As Dymphna Callaghan notes, “if Othello was a white man, so was Desdemona.” See her discussion in “‘Othello was a white man’: properties of race on Shakespeare’s stage” in *Alternative Shakespeares* Vol. 2 ed. Terence Hawkes (London: Routledge, 1996), 192-215. An all-female production of *Othello*, by the Los Angeles Women’s Shakespeare Company in March of 2008, raises questions about how we might differently understand the play when gender (but not race) is re-cast.

⁸⁶ See Kenneth Gross, *Shakespeare’s Noise* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 103-105.

Beyond Sexual Kinship

More recently, Toni Morrison's 2011 play, *Desdemona*, offers a uniquely complex rethinking of Desdemona and her whiteness.⁸⁷ As Desdemona tells her audience, "I am not the meaning of a name I did not choose," we are forced to acknowledge the complexity of race and gender that usual readings of the play do not afford when Desdemona is over-simplified by conventional tropes of white womanhood. If Desdemona is not bound to the meaning of this name, we might also reevaluate that name's being "begrimed and black." Morrison's play takes up Shakespeare's brief mention that Desdemona was raised by an African nurse, and centers itself on an evolving dialogue between the two women. In the original Shakespeare, Desdemona recalls her nursemaid at the end of the penultimate act:

My mother had a maid called Barbara;
She was in love; and he she lov'd proved mad,
And did forsake her; she had a song of 'Willow,'
An old thing 'twas, but it expressed her fortune,
And she died singing it; that song to-night
Will not go from my mind; I have much to do
But to go hang my head all at one side,
And sing it like poor Barbara. (4.3.26-33)

Desdemona proceeds to sing Barbara's "song of 'Willow,'" foreshadowing her own death as she is mirrored by the dead African woman. By taking up this parallel, Morrison conceives of a potential conversation between the two women, in the afterlife.

Morrison's revision juxtaposes Desdemona's retelling of the stories Othello told her during their courtship with the stories that Barbara (who becomes "Barbary" in Morrison's play) told Desdemona during her childhood. An announcement for the play's premiere explains Desdemona's enchantment with Othello through her familiarity with Barbara/Barbary (and hence, Africa): "Othello wooed Desdemona with stories of his adventures. Raised by an African,

⁸⁷ Toni Morrison, *Desdemona*. Dir. Peter Sellars. Wiener Festwochen, Vienna. World Premiere, 15 June 2011. New York Premier, Lincoln Center White Lights Festival, 2-3 November 2011.

Desdemona felt familiar and confident with Othello. The night of her own death, she sings the song Barbary sang at the moment of hers.”⁸⁸ Desdemona’s connection to Africa therefore precedes her relationship to Othello. We might surmise that Desdemona fell in love with Othello because, as Morrison’s play reveals, “Desdemona was brought up by an African maid who told her African stories.”⁸⁹ In this rendering, Desdemona does not first enter into interracial kinship through Othello, but through this maternal figure, in a relation that has the potential to transcend the tropic relation between the black “mammy” and white child, as the play’s end progresses toward a dialectic between the two women. Barbaray (played by *singer/song-writer* Rokia Traoré) is, indeed, given “equal staging—and equal voice—with Desdemona” in this play.⁹⁰ Thus, *Desdemona* asserts its own potential for a transracial feminism that is not only absent but unthinkable in either Shakespeare’s original or the nineteenth-century American blackface renditions.

Morrison opens up a space for the women of this play to function independently of Shakespeare’s male characters, and thereby Desdemona is able to re-create herself beyond the boundaries in which the normative model of white womanhood would inscribe her. In the play’s most striking moment, Barbary’s voice rings emphatic as a strength to be reckoned with, and Desdemona is brought to recognize that the kinship she longs for with Barbary is foreclosed by the elder woman’s enslavement. This moment focuses on the iconic relation between black women and the white children they raise as “mammies,” a relationship to which I will return in

⁸⁸ “Desdemona.” Wiener Festwochen website, <http://www.festwochen.at/index.php?id=eventdetail&L=1&detail=629> (Accessed 8 June 2011).

⁸⁹ Cindy Warner, “Peter Sellars starts rehearsal on *The Desdemona Project*, update of *Otello*.” *Examiner.com*, 28 April 2011, <http://www.examiner.com/opera-in-san-francisco/peter-sellars-starts-rehearsal-on-the-desdemona-project-update-of-otello>. (Accessed 8 June 2011)

⁹⁰ Erin Russell Thiessen, “Toni Morrison’s *Desdemona* delivers a haunting, powerful ‘re-Membering,’” *Expatica.com*, 26 May 2011, http://www.expatica.com/be/leisure/arts_culture/Desdemona-project_17437.html. (Accessed 8 June 2011)

the fourth chapter. The fact of this conversation, and its recognition of the power relations at stake between these two women – Desdemona’s recognition of Barbary’s oppression, and Barbary’s good faith judgment that Desdemona does not mean to further contribute to that oppression – sparks a potential for understanding between the two women. Desdemona imagines her own connection to the elder woman, who has become a source of strength, and in her refusal to take part in the white male patriarchy of the original play, its violence, and as Morrison and Peter Sellers, the director, suggest, its typical flatness of characters. As Morrison’s play progresses toward a dialogue between Desdemona and Barbary, it acknowledges past wrongs and abuses of Barbary, but plants seeds of hope in the character of Desdemona, leaving viewers with the open possibility for a viable relation of interracial kinship between the two women.

In a small way, the representation of a blackface Desdemona – like Morrison’s cultural Africanization of Desdemona through her approaching kinship with Barbary – critiques the standardization of blackface in legitimate theatrical productions of *Othello*. The “begrimed” Desdemona of the minstrel plays appears much as the “begrimed” Othello – neither an accurate representation of racial “whiteness” nor of “blackness,” but an indication of how race is constructed in these nineteenth-century representations. Particularly, the “begrimed” Desdemona displays blackness as transferrable and (feminine) whiteness as precarious, as white women may be racially-marked by their interracial sexuality. In this way, the versions of Desdemona presented in these minstrel plays evade the rhetorics of white womanhood and “miscegenation” that nineteenth-century American audiences would read into the play.

Charles Browning’s painting “Blackface” indicates how this medium of representation does not afford Desdemona the “delicacy” that John Quincy Adams would demand from the white womanhood of her more-serious counterpart. (See Figure 11) As Morrison’s play

indicates, however, the rhetorical “blackening” of Desdemona need not present as ridiculous, but might instead speak to the very serious need to re-figure Desdemona’s whiteness – and her relation to blackness – in Shakespeare’s play. These representations of “blackface Desdemona” in the nineteenth-century American social/cultural imaginary offer a different rhetoric of white womanhood: one in which Desdemona’s “whiteness” cannot be so neatly contrasted with Othello’s “blackness,” and in which the very bounds of “white” and “black” become both malleable and traversable within the realm of racial performance.



Figure 11: Charles Browning, “Blackface,” 2005, oil on canvas, 30” x 24”
<<http://www.foundrysite.com/browning/>>

My next chapter will continue this conversation about white womanhood in sexual kinship with African American men, by reading William Allen's narrative of his engagement and marriage to Mary King. Allen's text, by representing the various genres in which King's whiteness is read by their contemporaries, extends this conversation about representing white womanhood to the placement of the "white woman" in various genres. By paying attention to how this figure is read with the various expectations of different literary genres, we can better understand how the racialization of "whitening" or "blackening" are linked to practices of reading.

Chapter Three

“Almost Eliza”: Genre, Racialization, and Reading Mary King as a Mixed-Race Heroine

Your flight is a flight for freedom, and I can almost call you *Eliza*.

John Porter, letter to Mary King, March 27th, 1853

Reprinted in William Allen’s *The American Prejudice Against Color*, 1853

The proposed marriage of William G. Allen, the “Coloured Professor” of the New York Central College at McGrawville, and Mary King, the white daughter of abolitionists, was a popular controversy in Upstate New York in 1853.⁹¹ The couple’s engagement incited letters of family disapproval, newspaper commentary, and mob violence leading to their forced (though temporary) separation. According to Allen’s personal narrative of their engagement and marriage in *The American Prejudice Against Color* (1853), the couple met when he was openly received as a guest in the Kings’ abolitionist home and he and Mary’s relationship developed at the racially-integrated, co-educational school where Allen taught and King was a student. Allen recounts that King’s father and sister originally supported the couple’s engagement, but that Mr. King changed his opinion under pressure from his wife (Mary’s stepmother) and sons, all Christian abolitionists who nevertheless vehemently opposed “amalgamation.”⁹²

As can be seen from my discussion in chapter one, discourses against amalgamation reach back into the early Republic, and have literary roots in characters like James Fenimore Cooper’s Cora Munro, and other “tragic mulatta” characters, destined to die in their respective texts. While more radical writers such as Lydia Maria Child wrote in support of interracial marriage, texts such as Edward William Clay’s 1830s illustrations depicting “amalgamation,” Josiah Nott’s

⁹¹ I refer to this person as “Mary King” throughout my essay because this is what she is called throughout Allen’s narrative, which discusses events primarily before the couple’s marriage and any assumed change of her name.

“scientific” discussions of “hybrid” people as an “unnatural” or “contaminated” population because of their potentially inter-species conception and supposed eventual inability to propagate, and the nineteenth-century interpretations and revisions of *Othello* discussed in the previous chapter illustrate the extent to which overtly racist anti-amalgamationist rhetoric had become prevalent by the mid-nineteenth century. The debate that coined the term “miscegenation” during the 1864 Lincoln reelection campaign clearly brings this discourse into the realm of political campaigning, and “anti-amalgamation” literature became more highly visible following the Civil War, most emphatically in plantation nostalgia fiction, a genre whose popularity extended well into the twentieth century.

While King and Allen were visiting with friends in Fulton, New York on Sunday, January 30, 1853, a white-supremacist mob descended upon the couple, threatening Allen with physical violence unless he immediately left town and forcibly escorting King to her parents’ home. This mob (a group of white men) framed their interference as the benevolent “rescue” of a white “damsel” from the supposedly-undesirable fate of interracial marriage. Following this separation, Allen and King eventually managed to correspond (at first under the surveillance of King’s family and then through third parties) and ultimately eloped. They were married in New York City on March 30, 1853 and soon emigrated to England, never returning to the United States.

In a letter written to King during the week before she and Allen were married, the couple’s friend, John Porter, wrote, “Your flight is a flight for freedom, and I can almost call you *Eliza*,” referencing the well-known mixed-race heroine of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (87). Porter’s evocation of abolitionist literature is intriguing not only because it refuses to perform the more obvious slippage of relegating prejudice against the African American Allen (a man who was born to a free mixed-race woman and was never enslaved) to the discourse of

slavery, but because it chooses the white woman as its subject and re-figures her in one of abolitionism's most popular tropes of enslavement, the mixed-race heroine.⁹³ Not merely an equation of all race-related persecution with slavery, Porter's comparison of Mary King to Stowe's Eliza displaces the racist rhetoric of the couple's forced separation, which rendered King a "damsel" in need of the white male "protection" that the mob purported to give her. Instead, Porter's "reading" of Mary King's position places her in the abolitionist literary tradition, where her and Allen's story reads as a narrative of African American fugitivity rather than white captivity. Moreover, Porter's characterization of King as "almost . . . Eliza" emphasizes a close generic proximity to the figure of the mixed-race heroine, recognizing the interracial allegiance of King and Allen's proposed kinship, and a re-racialization of the figure of the white woman along lines of her participation in interracial sexual relations and reproduction.⁹⁴

Like Desdemona, Mary King exhibits a sentiment incompatible with dominant imaginings of white womanhood – her sexual desire for the male racial Other, a desire which implies the breakdown of imagined biological racial barriers in its potential to produce racially-mixed children. In her refiguring, Mary King's white womanhood is re-positioned against (and in opposition to) white maleness. As in Mary Jemison's struggle to protect and feed her children during General Sullivan's 1779 "scorched earth" campaign, most white men in Allen's narrative become Mary King's adversaries – her captors, silencers, and oppressors, rather than her would-

⁹³ For more on William G. Allen's biography, see Richard J. Blackett, "William G. Allen, The Forgotten Professor" *Civil War History* 26 (March 1980): 39-52 and Sarah Elbert's introduction to *The American Prejudice Against Color* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002), which includes both of Allen's personal narratives, *The American Prejudice Against Color: An Authentic Narrative, Showing How Easily the Nation Got into An Uproar* (1853) and *A Personal Narrative* (1860).

⁹⁴ I stipulate here that King and Allen's kinship ties are implied by their intent to marry, at which time their familial relationship to one another would be taken for granted based on their legal marriage relation, the assumption that they would then share a "family" name, and – importantly – the probability that they would produce children together. The implied (though supposedly future) sexual relation in their engagement is therefore the basis for King and Allen's entrance into interracial kinship. I will discuss the particular implications of Mary King as the potential mother of children who are differently-raced from herself later in this essay.

be protectors. By refiguring Mary King as “an Eliza” – a mixed-race literary figure who is both aligned with the enslaved, and able to garner white sympathy – we can better gauge the content of King’s “whiteness,” an ideological construction that she resists despite public attempts to preserve the biologically and emotionally-conceived notions of white womanhood to which she is attached.

This chapter takes up John Porter’s comparison of Mary King and Eliza Harris and reads King as the mixed-race heroine of Allen’s narrative. In the private and public discourse surrounding William Allen’s engagement and marriage to Mary King, I will examine themes of “amalgamation” and fugitivity in order to discuss how Mary King is figured according to different generic constructions of racialized womanhood in the two primary versions of the story Allen reproduces – his own version, and that in support of the racist mob that separated the couple. First, I discuss the racist rhetorics by which Mary King is read in the tradition of what I call “anti-amalgamation” literature – a sub-genre of the body of writing that emerges in response to abolitionist literature, which has its roots in the American captivity narrative. Understanding how Mary King functions generically in these versions of her and Allen’s story helps us to understand accounts of King’s ostensible “rescue” from interracial marriage. That is, the writing and rewriting of the Allen-King relationship demonstrate how the racialization of characters within specific literary genres structures how living people are “read” according to similar processes of racialization.

Reading Allen’s narrative, I go on to illustrate how Mary King functions more closely to the mixed-race heroine of abolitionist literature than the “damsel” of the captivity narrative. By refiguring Mary King in the terms by which an abolitionist reader compares her to the a mixed-race literary figure who is both aligned with the enslaved and able to garner white sympathy, we

can better gauge the content of King's "whiteness," an ideological construction that she resists despite public attempts to preserve the notions of white womanhood to which the captivity-narrative version of her story attaches her. Lastly, I turn to William Allen's 1852 commentary on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in *Frederick Douglass' Paper* and the significance of Allen's own focus on Stowe's character Cassy rather than Eliza. I read Porter's construction of King as "almost Eliza" alongside the logic by which Cassy becomes a memorable figure in Allen's reading. By reading Allen and King's story in relation to those of Stowe's "quadroon" heroines, Eliza and Cassy, it is possible to escape the underpinnings of the moderate – racial separatist – brand of abolitionism with which Stowe's novel concludes. When we take seriously the idea of King functioning in the generic role of the mixed-race heroine, we are open to the more radical possibilities of Allen's narrative.

Additionally, paying attention to the abolitionist rhetoric in Allen's narrative shows how William Allen, John Porter, and Mary King appropriate the concept of fugitivity for the cause against racial prejudice, rather than enslavement. While enslavement may very well have been a more hideous national problem than racial prejudice, the fact that racial prejudice cannot be legislated away – and could not even be erased through civil war – presents racism as the more insidious national problem. Allen's focus on "prejudice" acknowledges this problem as more fundamental than enslavement by hinting that even the abolition of slavery will not correct the "American prejudice against color." While abolitionist discourse subsumes the condition of free African Americans in the nineteenth-century United States, Allen's narrative appropriation of abolitionist rhetoric re-purposes abolitionist literature towards a more-radical, antiracist cause. In effect, reading Mary King as a mixed-race heroine challenges popular assumptions about white womanhood, illustrates how racializing this character becomes a practice of reading her story,

and thereby challenges us to read characters across lines of race and genre, opening up new possibilities for understanding nineteenth-century texts.

The “Mary Rescue”: Mary King and Anti-Amalgamation Literature

Mary King and William Allen’s marriage was not illegal in New York State in 1853.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, the absence of laws preventing the marriage of white and black people did not ensure that such marriages would be accepted equally by white northerners. Allen’s personal narrative acknowledges what writers such as Harriet Wilson and Frank Webb also depict in their narratives of mid-century race relations: the fact of northern racism.⁹⁶ The title of Allen’s narrative, *The American Prejudice Against Color: An Authentic Narrative, Showing How Easily the Nation Got into An Uproar*, is clear to emphasize racism, rather than slavery, as its central problem. In *The American Prejudice Against Color*, Allen both tells his own version of the events surrounding his and King’s engagement and marriage and reproduces various newspaper accounts written in opposition to their marriage and even in support of the mob that threatened

⁹⁵ At the heart of anti-miscegenation law is not simply the belief that racial sexual mixing was “unnatural,” but that white supremacist ideologies were also highly-invested in preserving “white” property and inheritance. Peggy Pascoe argues this point in *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). However, the case of William Allen and Mary King’s marriage does not directly concern this body of law, as interracial marriage was never illegal in New York State, where they lived. For a clear picture of where, when, and to whom, interracial sexual relations were illegal in the United States between 1662 and 1967, see the extremely useful interactive Legal Map for Interracial Relationships at the Loving Day website: <http://lovingday.org/legal-map>. Loving Day is an organization dedicated to celebrating interracial relationships, and draws its name from the 1967 Supreme Court *Loving v. Virginia* case, which decided that state laws barring interracial marriage were unconstitutional. For more on the legality of interracial marriage in the United States, see Eva Saks, “Representing Miscegenation Law,” *Raritan* 8.2 (Fall 1988): 39–69.

⁹⁶ See Harriet E. Wilson, *Our Nig; or, Sketches in the Life of a Free Black*, Ed., Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Richard J. Ellis (New York: Vintage, 2011) and Frank J. Webb, *The Garies and Their Friends* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997). Martha Hodes’ *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* offers a case-study history of relationships between black men and white women in the South, a relation she argues shifts from the antebellum to the post-Civil War period. Other texts that discuss accounts of interracial sexual relations in the nineteenth-century United States include Hodes, *The Sea Captain’s Wife: A True Story of Love, Race, and War in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007) and *Sex, Love, Race: Crossing Boundaries in North American History* (New York: New York University Press, 1999); Joshua D. Rothman, *Notorious in the Neighborhood: Sex and Families Across the Color Line in Virginia, 1787-1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); and Cassandra Jackson, *Barriers Between Us: Interracial Sex in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004).

them. By this juxtaposition, the narrative reveals popular anxieties surrounding interracial marriage, or “amalgamation” in the nineteenth century, but further speaks to questions about how race works generically in the various retellings of the Allen-King story.

Reading these generic differences shows how the figure of the “white woman” is positioned at the center of white racial anxieties. My focus on the figure of the white woman in the Allen-King story seeks to acknowledge the significance of this positioning, while also acknowledging (and hopefully not reinforcing) problems that arise as a result of such focus on the figure of the white woman: the false assumption that the category “white women” can be easily determined; the non-representative universalizing of the “white woman” as a central, national figure; and the potential masking of “non-white” women and their struggles.

Figuring Mary King as an embodiment of popular ideologies about white womanhood, most popular accounts of her story paint her as an innocent “victim” of an alleged racial “threat” posed by Allen. The nature of white violence in response to this supposed threat is implied, though not explicitly stated as Allen invokes the “various tourturings and mutilations of person . . . too shocking to be named in the pages of this book,” which he was intended to endure only if he and King had already been married at the mob’s arrival.⁹⁷ I would like to posit the mob and its supporters’ response to Allen and King as an attempt to write their story in light of an assumed positioning of characters. In effect, this writing (or rewriting) attempts to situate Allen and King generically, within a distinct narrative framework. This framework is accompanied by a series of assumptions about how the characters resemble recognizable tropes and expectations that they will function in predictable ways, thus anticipating how the story’s plot will progress.

⁹⁷ William G. Allen, *The American Prejudice Against Color*, ed. Sarah Elbert. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002), 56. All subsequent quotations from this text are from this edition, and will be indicated parenthetically. It seems most reasonable to surmise that castration or some other sexual violence is implied in this passage, indicating that the “threat” Allen is assumed to pose and from which Mary King must ostensibly be “rescued” is also sexual in nature.

Edward Clay's illustration of "Female Intrepidity" depicts a typical narrative of the supposed relation between white women and black men. (See Figure 12) The text below the image explains the situation clearly enough:

On Monday night, April 1st, 1839 about 12 o'clock, in Greenwich Township, New Jersey, a black fellow belonging to General Williamson, broke open the door of Mr. Jacob Williamson's house, during his absence, with the intention of violating the person of his wife, but Mrs. Williamson, with great presence of mind, seized a fowling piece, which was fortunately loaded, and shot him dead on the spot.

The threat/victim relation is demarked along black/white and male/female lines in this scenario, and the underlying sexual threat is accompanied by the imperative to protect the white woman from interracial sex – figured only as sexual violation – at all costs.

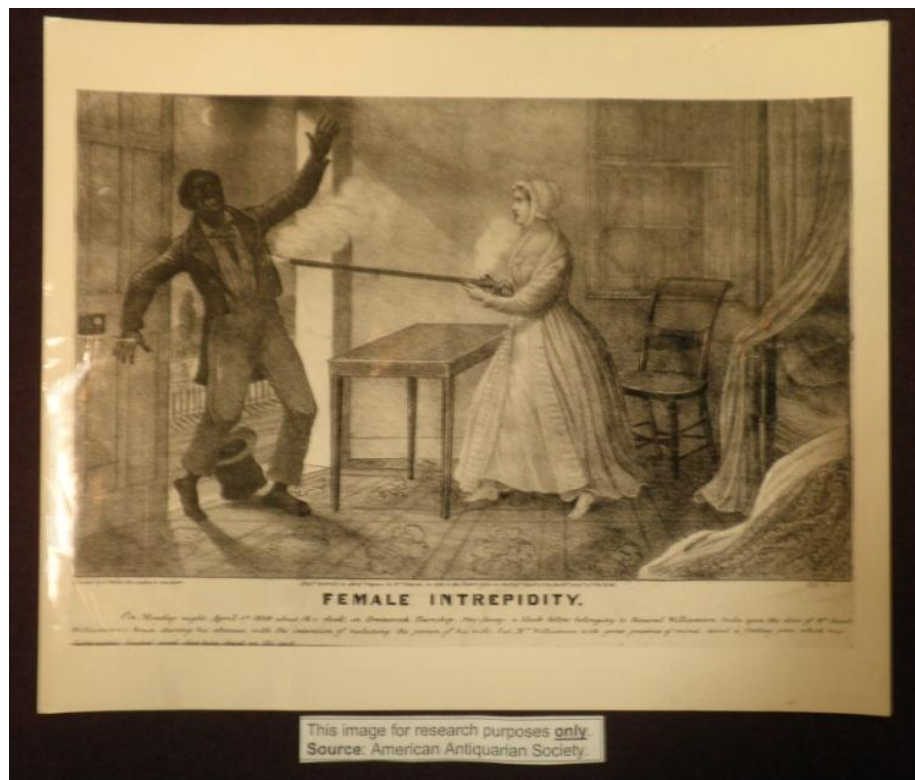


Figure 12: Edward Williams Clay, "Female Intrepidity"
[New York]: Printed by I. Childs, 160 1/2 Fulton St. New York, [c1839]
American Antiquarian Society

The image, itself, is reminiscent of the 1773 frontispiece to the *Narrative of the Sufferings, Captivity, and Removes of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, in which Mary Rowlandson holds a gun to ward off Indian intruders. (See Figure 13) The threat of the male racial Other – a threat that carefully positions the figure of the white woman – is at the center of both the captivity narrative and the genre we might call “anti-amalgamation literature.”⁹⁸ Developing from a literary genre in which the racial Other is posed as somehow dangerous to normative models of whiteness, anti-amalgamation literature characteristically emphasizes its central threat as that “fate worse than death”: interracial sex.



Figure 13: Title page, *A Narrative of the Captivity, Sufferings, and Removes of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (Boston: John Boyle’s Printing Office, 1773)

⁹⁸ What I am calling “anti-amalgamation literature” is also closely connected to a broader, overlapping genre of anti-abolition literature. I will discuss these connections further below.

These genres' similar positioning of the white woman at the center of their narratives, and their similar structuring of her kinship relations along lines of racial allegiance develop her as a figure in need of white male protection from non-white men. In this, the absence of the white man in Clay's image does not mean that his rhetorical presence is not implied: Mr. Williamson, in his relation to the white woman (a legal relation, as well as a social one), is evoked as his wife's would-be protector, even though he does not appear in the image and is quickly glossed over in the narrative description.⁹⁹ The captivity narrative makes particular assumptions about the white woman. Perhaps most characteristic is the assumption that her familial and sexual allegiances are with white men, rather than non-white men. Therefore, this genre has particular difficulty placing stories about women for whom this is not the case. Discussions of Mary Jemison illustrate the difficulty of categorizing a white woman who does not meet the sexual/racial expectations of the captivity narrative.¹⁰⁰

"Anti-amalgamation" literature, of course, depends upon similar assumptions about racial allegiance. The anti-amalgamation genre with which white racists describe the King-Allen engagement does not require King's acknowledgement of her alleged captivity, as the threat of the male racial Other is stipulated, even though evidence of this threat does not appear in Allen's account. Significantly, there is no account of Mary King confirming this narrative of a threatening interracial encounter. The mob's characterization of King's part in her proposed marriage to Allen not only reveals white anxiety about "amalgamation," but also defines the quickness with which the mob would explain King's actions, even at the risk of denying her all

⁹⁹ Christopher Castiglia discusses the larger implications of the white male presence in the captivity narrative in *Bound and Determined*. See 8-9, 20-25, and 37-38 for examples of this discussion.

¹⁰⁰ June Namias and Christopher Castiglia both note the difficulty of placing Jemison generically in the captivity narrative tradition in *White Captives* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993) and *Bound and Determined: Captivity, Culture-Crossing, and White Womanhood from Mary Rowlandson to Patty Hearst* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), respectively.

agency as a victim. Conceived as either an opponent to or a passive agent in the proposed interracial marriage, the mob assumes Mary King to be either 1) complicit in their action by sharing the mob's racial anxieties and having rejected Allen's unwelcome proposal, or 2) an impressionable youth, corrupted by the teachings of her abolitionist family and/or her integrated college, and therefore unfit to make decisions regarding her marriage. Both cases assume that Mary King is in need of white male protection. Providing this "protection" is the mob's primary pretended purpose.

Newspaper accounts refer to the mob event as "The Fulton Rescue Case," "Another Rescue," and "The Mary Rescue" (75, 63, 62) emphasizing the supposed threat that Allen poses and the necessity of rescuing King, while also making a blatant mockery of the local abolitionist movement.¹⁰¹ The narrative in which Mary King is figured as a "damsel" in need of "rescue" shows how the structures of kinship at work in this genre would position the white woman in kinship with white men because of assumed ties of consanguinity and, because of the assumed absence of such ties, in an adversarial relationship with non-white men. When relations between black men and white women are the focus, however, mere "captivity" is no longer at the center of this story, but is replaced by the explicitly sexual threat that black men supposedly pose.

Closely related to and overlapping with the genre of "anti-abolition" literature, "anti-amalgamation" literature depends upon the construction of both black male sexuality and white female racism. Visual texts such as Edward William Clay's "Female Intrepidity," as well as his "amalgamation" images of the same year [*The Fruits of Amalgamation*, *An Amalgamation Waltz* and *Practical Amalgamation (The Wedding)* and (*Musical Soirée*)] illustrate the extent of overtly

¹⁰¹ These references are also meant to satirize the "Jerry Rescue" of October 1, 1851. During the anti-slavery Liberty Party Convention in Syracuse, NY, a group of local abolitionists and activists in the Underground Railroad illegally freed William "Jerry" Henry, who had been arrested and held under the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, and ultimately helped him escape to Canada. At the climax of this rescue, a crowd of approximately twenty-five hundred people stormed the Police Justice offices, where Jerry was being held.

racist anti-amalgamationist rhetoric in such texts. The “miscegenation” debate during the 1864 election campaign clearly brings this discourse into the realm of political campaigning, and “anti-amalgamation” literature becomes more highly visible following the Civil War, as one facet of plantation nostalgia fiction.¹⁰²

Abolitionist attention to amalgamation tended to focus on the sexual exploitation and rape of enslaved women, citing amalgamation as another of the particular evils of the “peculiar institution” of slavery. This can be seen in popular texts such as Richard Hildreth’s *The White Slave*, Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and William Wells Brown’s *Clotel*. The genre of “anti-amalgamation” literature, in contrast, focuses most heavily on the supposed “threat” of sexual relations between black men and white women. Such texts imagine the black man’s sexuality as explicitly directed at the white woman, whom he supposedly prefers to women of other races.¹⁰³ Determining the black man as a “threat” to both white women, individually, and to an imagined white racial preservation, generally, is often at the center of these discussions.¹⁰⁴

The similarities between captivity narrative and “anti-amalgamation” literature and the trajectory from one genre to the other are apparent in the rhetoric of the captivity genre in these racist counter-narratives of King and Allen. By focusing the story around a basic assumption about King, (i.e., that she does not desire Allen, or at the very least, that marrying him is not in her best interests) these accounts foreclose other genres in which we might read their story,

¹⁰² Later examples of this discourse include Thomas Dixon’s *The Clansman* (1905), the epic depiction of which was D.W. Griffith’s film, *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and would-be U.S. Senator from Georgia Rebecca Latimer Felton, who, in an infamous letter to the *Atlanta Constitution*, wrote “. . . if it needs lynching to protect woman’s dearest possession from the ravening human beasts----then I say lynch, a thousand times a week if necessary.” See her letter to the *Atlanta Constitution*, 11 August, 1897 reprinted in *The Marrow of Tradition*, edited by Nancy Bentley and Sandra Gunning (New York: Bedford/St. Martins), 409-411.

¹⁰³ Elise Lemire discusses the history of this imagined racial “preference,” linking it with an “aesthetic hierarchy of the races” in *Miscegenation: Making Race in America*, 5.

¹⁰⁴ Eric Lott discusses a white working-class male concern with black masculinity as central to the minstrel tradition in *Love and Theft*, (9). This is not, of course, an explicitly nineteenth-century phenomenon. The phenomenon of “the white man’s obsession with the black man’s penis” can be seen in twentieth century texts such as Normal Mailer’s *White Negro* (1957), John Howard Griffin’s *Black Like Me* (1961) and the writings of James Baldwin.

particularly the genres through which Allen, King, and their abolitionist friends recount their narrative. The conflicting discourses of “rescue” and “imprisonment” surrounding King are evidently at odds in Allen’s narrative, as he positions anti-amalgamationist narratives against his own version of his and King’s story.

“Almost Eliza”: Mary King as a Mixed-Race Heroine

Foreclosing an “anti-amalgamationist” reading of the white woman, Mary King’s letters never suggest Allen as a threat or that her relationship with him is anything but voluntary. The disingenuousness of the supposed purpose of her “rescue” is evident in King’s own accounts, as these assumptions are, of course, inconsistent with her eventual marriage to Allen and departure from her white family in the United States. The narrative Allen provides is of a different genre – and its heroine of a different kind – than the one implied in the story of mob action or the accompanying newspaper rhetoric of her “rescue.” Allen gives King’s voice a prominent place in his narrative, reproducing excerpts of King’s personal letters, which emphasize the imprisonment to which she is subjected by her so-called “protectors.”

These respective positionings of Mary King indicate two separate and competing genres in which the white woman might function in the Allen-King story: the anti-amalgamationist literature of newspaper accounts and the body of abolitionist literature from which Allen is drawing and which contextualizes his narrative. The figure of Mary King functions differently in each of these genres. While in the former she appears as a white woman in need of white male protection from black men, in the latter she functions in the role of the mixed-race heroine. Elise Lemire’s discussion of whiteness as a position of sexual/racial desire is useful here, as she explains “whites” as a group constructed around having “certain tastes.” Lemire argues that

“whiteness is an identity people can only claim if they have certain sexual race preferences.”¹⁰⁵

Considering this racialization of sexual desire, King and Allen’s engagement and the potential for interracial kinship relations that their desire implies suggest that we might read King as differently racialized here than when she is associated with more familiar tropes of white womanhood.

When we bracket the prominent model of white femininity (the “damsel” in need of white male “rescue”) presented in the racist newspaper accounts and view it against her own letters, Mary King can be seen as actively struggling against white male domination in seeking marriage freedom (ironically, in a state in which interracial marriage was not illegal.) A closer examination of alternative representations of King illuminates how she works against the periodical press’ representation of her as adhering to popular nineteenth-century tropes of white womanhood – particularly that of the white woman who desires sexual racial segregation. Further, this racist version of white womanhood is not figured as making a mere choice of sexual relations here, but as regarding this version of non-normative, interracial sexuality as a threat. Accordingly, the article “Another Rescue,” which Allen cites as appearing in the February 1st edition of the anti-abolitionist *Syracuse Star*, registers this alleged “threat” as King is thrice referred to as “the damsel.”¹⁰⁶ In Allen’s representations, however, we find a character more proximate to the mixed-race heroine of abolitionist fiction than to the white “damsel” of anti-amalgamation rhetoric. King’s proximity to non-white kin (i.e., her intended marriage to Allen, which also implies the possibility of their future mixed-race children) distances her from the normative model of white womanhood contained in the captivity or “anti-amalgamationist” genres.

¹⁰⁵ Lemire, *Miscegenation*, 4.

¹⁰⁶ Allen, *The American Prejudice Against Color*, 64-5.

While reading King as a more normative white heroine suggests the privilege of whiteness in the supposed protection of white womanhood, the reality of her story is that the alleged “protection” of the white mob actually endangers both herself and her potential kin. This turns any assumption about the permanence of white privilege on its head, exposing how King is not fixed within, but can be removed from this category of protected white womanhood.¹⁰⁷ By reading King’s imprisonment at the hands of white men, her fugitivity in a society that seeks to (legally or otherwise) disallow interracial marriage, and her own declared interracial desire for Allen, we read a character who might better be compared with the “quadroons” of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (published the year before the Allen-King controversy) than with the dominant, racist ideal.¹⁰⁸ It is with these models of alternatively-raced and racialized womanhood, found most explicitly in the genre of abolitionist literature that we might best contextualize Allen’s narrative.

Discourses of abolition and amalgamation were tightly linked by the 1850s: because the two words were often conflated in pro-slavery rhetoric, some abolitionists found it necessary to promote “anti-amalgamationist” beliefs, while others (including Allen, himself) argued that interracial marriage freedom was a necessary condition for rather than simply a result of legal racial equality.¹⁰⁹ As a counter to the “threat” of racial equality that abolitionism supposedly

¹⁰⁷ For extensive discussions of the social, material, and legal benefits of white privilege, see George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), Cheryl Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” *Harvard Law Review* 106.8 (1993): 1707–1791, and Ian Haney-López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

¹⁰⁸ Sarah Elbert acknowledges Allen’s centering his narrative on the problem of American racism rather than the supposed “problem” his marriage to Mary King presented. Here she also describes Allen and King in terms of fugitivity, remarking that, though William Allen was never enslaved, “he and his white bride, Mary King Allen, were indeed fugitives, [when they fled the United States to England in 1853], fleeing for their lives from ‘the American Prejudice Against Color’” (*American Prejudice* 4). I will discuss how this position of fugitivity is expressly depicted in their narrative, below.

¹⁰⁹ Lydia Maria Child, a prominent abolitionist, presents her own radical support of interracial marriage in her 1836 *An Appeal in Favor of Americans Called Africans*. (New York: Arno Press, 1968), 196. For other examples of this argument, see her letter to the *New York Daily Tribune*, 3 September, 1852, reprinted in *A Lydia Maria Child*

proposed, terming the mob's actions a "rescue" both mocked abolitionist efforts to help self-emancipated people (especially following the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, which required them to assist in their re-enslavement) and defined the agency of the white womanhood in which Mary King was inscribed in these accounts. The assumption that King requires white men to "rescue" her from Allen, a black man, would align her with both racism and anti-abolitionism. Her own contrasting account of "imprisonment" aligns her with anti-racism, abolitionism, and – importantly – the enslaved and the enslavable.

What the "anti-amalgamationist" genre fails to imagine is the possibility of the white woman as non-racist –most explicitly figured here as the possibility of her interracial sexual desire and kinship relations. Even where they foreclose the possibility of such desire, abolitionist texts such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* demand that their (assumedly white) readers extend sympathy to characters who are not (legally, even if visually) white.¹¹⁰ Further, in abolitionist literature we find the mixed-race heroine more prominently-figured, even, than the (here abolitionist) ideal of white womanhood.¹¹¹ Mixed-race characters' relation to race and their embodiment of racial dualism are at the center of these popular stories. The mixed-race heroine in abolitionist literature often appears in the role of the "tragic mulatta," whose tragedy lies not only with her inability to articulate or reconcile visual/legal/social racial identity, but with her position of precariousness or vulnerability. The "tragic mulatta" narrative differs most evidently from the

Reader, ed. Carolyn L. Karcher (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 262-266. William Lloyd Garrison also supports interracial marriage in articles appearing in *The Liberator* on "The Marriage Law," appearing May 7 and 21, 1831.

¹¹⁰ For example, in the account of Mrs. Bird, the Senator's wife, Stowe asks the reader directly to think of their own children as they contemplate the flight of Eliza and her son, Harry. See Chapter IX, In Which it Appears That a Senator is But a Man. A common critique of Stowe's "whitewashed" sympathetic depiction of mixed-race (and visually-white) characters to garner abolitionist sympathy (as was a common trope in abolitionist writing) can be seen in James Baldwin's well-known piece, "Everybody's Protest Novel" (in *Notes of a Native Son*, 1955).

¹¹¹ This is true, to some extent, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, where Eliza's story spans a greater length of the novel than does that of Little Eva. The prioritization of mixed-race heroines is more emphatically the case in texts such as Lydia Maria Child's "The Quadroons" (1842) and *Romance of the Republic* (1867), and William Wells Brown's *Clotel* (1853).

captivity narrative because their heroines, though figured in many ways “like” the white women of captivity narratives, cannot be “rescued” by white men. If these women can be “rescued” at all in such narratives, this “rescue” is dependent on their own efforts, rather than on those of white men, who are generally depicted either as adversaries or as generally ineffectual in their efforts to assist the efforts of mixed-race women characters.¹¹² Whatever biological or rhetorical whiteness such characters may possess seldom translates to the structures of kinship with white men that would allow for their protection. White males in this genre usually do not acknowledge their kinship with mixed-race people; and even if they do, this kinship is legally illegitimate, rendering even well-intentioned white men powerless to protect mixed-race women from enslavement and all the dangers to which enslavement subjects them. Further, because the mixed-race heroine’s self-identification is often aligned with blackness rather than whiteness, the precariousness they experience also extends to their (actual or potential) children.

I want to suggest that Mary King, as she is articulated in Allen’s account and in his reproduction of her correspondence, exhibits characteristics less indicative of the models of white womanhood available in places such as the captivity narrative and anti-abolition/anti-amalgamation literatures, and more like those found in the mixed-race heroine of abolitionist literary discourse. At the heart of this resemblance is the similarity of these characters’ fugitive positions. Like the mixed-race heroine, Mary King is positioned as precarious with relation to the white men who are better understood as her captors and adversaries than her rescuers. Her sexual desire for Allen and their future of shared domesticity in marriage places her in relations of interracial kinship (both to him and to their future children) rather than within the bounds of

¹¹² Examples of white male adversaries seem available enough. Simon Legree is, of course, at the head of this list. In the latter group, I am thinking of characters such as Henry Morton in William Wells Brown’s *Clotel*, and each of Cassy’s lovers in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*: the “young lawyer” who is Henry and Elise’s father, and Captain Stewart.

normalized white American domesticity. Both King's adversarial relation to white men and her kinship with non-white people work to figure her fugitivity – a fugitivity that aligns her with non-white and enslaved people via her relation to her white family and to the American nation.

By blaming Mary King's abolitionist upbringing or education by "her Amalgamation-preaching parents" for her "inappropriate" marriage choice, as the newspaper account of "Another Rescue" described events (*American Prejudice* 64), the common conflation of abolitionism (the Kings were, in fact, abolitionists) and amalgamation becomes apparent: Abolitionism is a slippery slope, and the emancipation of enslaved blacks will inevitably lead to other, even more radical, forms of equality. As Karen Woods Weierman notes: "the proslavery press dubbed abolitionists 'amalgamationists,' equating support for emancipation with the endorsement of intermarriage. Actual intermarriages also tested the commitment of abolitionists to racial equality" (102). Similar to Elise Lemire's idea of race as dependent upon sexual racial "preference," this association posits race as an alignment with a particular political ideology. The underlying implication of the conflation of racial ideology and embodiment is that a political position could rhetorically re-race a person. In part, the conflation of physical and ideological racialization aligns whiteness with white supremacy and blackness with a spectrum of political positions that include racial egalitarianism. Still, these two concepts of race – as sexual racial preference and as political affiliation – are connected.

For example, charges that the Republican party, in its leanings toward abolitionism, also supported more radical views on "amalgamation" sparked a heated debate during the season leading to the 1864 presidential election. These public discussions, and literary frauds, lead to the coining of the word "miscegenation" in the anonymously-published pamphlet by David Goodman Croly and George Wakeman, *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races*,

Applied to the American White Man and Negro (1863) and texts such as L. Seaman's "What Miscegenation is!, and what we are to Expect, now that Mr. Lincoln is Elected President" (1865?). They also caused Lincoln, himself, to denounce claims that he supports interracial marriage, (as he also denounced any support for the right of blacks to vote or serve on juries). Lincoln most famously declared his belief in a "natural" aversion to interracial marriage among whites in an 1857 speech remarking on "that counterfeit logic which concludes that, because I do not want a black woman for a *slave* that I must necessarily want her for a *wife*." Lincoln continues, "I need not have her for either. I can just leave her alone. In some respects she is certainly not my equal."¹¹³ Democrats' insinuation that Abraham Lincoln was a "black Republican" conflated the political position in support of abolition with the charge of supporting amalgamation by suggesting Lincoln's abolitionism also implied a preference for African American women.¹¹⁴

More interesting for Allen's narrative are the connections between abolitionism and amalgamation evident in the abolitionist rhetoric that he employs, and in the characteristically abolitionist sympathy that Allen and King evoke from their few supporters. In Allen's presentation, the relation between amalgamation and abolition appears in terms of a shared potential for persecution or "fugitivity"—the precarious position, or "impermanence" of the enslaved, which points to the perpetual possibility of they (or their loved ones) being uprooted and relays the fugitive position of the self-emancipated following the Fugitive Slave Act. For

¹¹³ See *Abraham Lincoln: Speeches and Writings, 1832-1858*. Edited by Don E. Fehrenbacher (New York: The Library of America, 1989), 397-398. Elise Lemire discusses Lincoln's stance on "miscegenation" in her book, *Miscegenation: Making Race in America*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002). See especially, pages 116-123 and 138-142.

¹¹⁴ For a discussion of mid-century Democrats' fear and hatred of "Black Republicanism," (implicating supposed support for racial equality) see James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*, 159-60. Karen Woods Weierman writes about links between abolition and intermarriage in light of Allen's narrative in *One Nation, One Blood: Interracial Marriage in American Fiction, Scandal, and Law, 1820-1870*. For a discussion of literary connections between abolitionism and interracial intermarriage, see her discussion of Allen in chapter 4, and of works by Child, Webb, and Harper in chapter 6.

King and Allen, this fugitivity appears in the threat that the larger white community poses for the couple, even when not formally threatened by law. I mean to suggest here a sense of the word “fugitive” similar to what Stephen Knadler uses to “designate the counter hegemonic cultural work of influential people of color who, like Frederick Douglass in his own fugitive slave narrative, sought to intervene in whiteness’s multiple racial formations by reevaluating its heterogeneous meaning.”¹¹⁵ In this sense, we might regard the fugitivity of white characters such as Mary King as inflecting another meaning of whiteness – one that is not definite or stable, but which is positioned in precarious proximity to blackness and therefore sympathetic to the racially-fugitive position of the enslavable.

This proximity is why both John Porter and his wife, Sarah, use the language of abolitionism to describe the King family’s endeavors to prevent the couple’s marriage, calling to mind the enslavement of African Americans as Mary King’s escape from her family is coupled with the rhetoric of futitivity. Sarah Porter, having knowledge of their intended elopement and emigration, writes to Mary King, “Now, dear Sister, farewell, and as you depart from this boasted ‘land of liberty and equal rights,’ and go among strangers, that you may, indeed, enjoy liberty, be not despondent, but cheerful, ever remembering the message of your angel mother” (89). We might surmise that this message of King’s deceased mother was one of abolitionism – even, perhaps, a radical brand of abolitionism that preached racial equality, that rare antiracism which would endorse King and Allen’s marriage.¹¹⁶ In this context, King’s imprisonment

¹¹⁵ See Knadler’s discussion in the introduction to *The Fugitive Race* (ix). For a further discussion of fugitivity, see Michael Chaney’s discussion of the August 11, 1854 issue of *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, in which an anonymous writer critiques the contrast between the “icon of fugitivity” in advertisements for runaway slaves and the image of so-called “permanence” in the happy nuclear family within Uncle Tom and Aunt Chloe’s cabin, in *Fugitive Vision*, p. 1-2.

¹¹⁶ The long history of using imagery of enslavement to describe the condition of women (particularly related to their legal state of coverture in marriage and to the “competition” between black men and white women for civil rights) is also worth mentioning here. Though these implications are not central to Sarah and John Porter’s encouragement to Mary King, they resonate as we think about the conditions that create King as a potentially unfree

becomes fugitivity as she and Allen make plans to elope. No longer believing that their marriage is supportable in the United States, the couple – like some of the nation’s most prominent self-emancipated people following the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act – emigrated to England.

There is a difference between the legal racial marking by which “women who crossed the color line became black in terms of their legal status,” and the re-racialization of Mary King within the genre of the mixed-race heroine.¹¹⁷ Still, both constructions of white womanhood are governed by structures of kinship which orient white women who would marry non-white men and bear mixed-race children. As Porter reads Mary King in the tradition of the mixed-race heroine, he not only reveals King’s purported “protectors” as impinging upon her personal freedom, but also as threatening her future, racially “mixed,” family. When King’s potential family is taken into account, this reading reveals her changed relationship to the nation and an understanding of familial bonds akin to those who are enslaved or enslavable: because of this marriage choice, King considers herself, like the fugitive, unwelcome in the United States. As she writes of her and Allen’s homelessness as they are about to emigrate, King casts herself in abolitionist language, as her marriage choice has made her an outsider to the nation of their birth: “I feel that I have no home but in the heart of the one I love, and no country until I reach one where the cruel and crushing hand of Republican America can no longer tear me from you” (89-90). Not only can she no longer align herself with “Republican America” in this regard, but she also regards the nation, like the white mob, as a threat to her chosen kinship ties.

subject with regard to her marriage’s existence within the same white paternalistic system that puts Allen in danger of enslavement.

¹¹⁷ Karen Woods Weierman illustrates this kind of legal racial marking in reference to a 1723 Virginia Law specifying that the wives of black or Indian men would be tithable according to the rules taxing the labor of non-white women, regardless of the wife’s race. (White women, regarded as dependent, were not subject to this tax.) See Weierman’s discussion in *One Nation, One Blood*, 126.

If we did not know these words to be Mary King's, they could just as easily be those of Eliza Harris, writing to her husband, George. The coupling of "home" and "country" in King's letter sounds not unlike the image of domestic happiness Eliza dreams of while at the Quaker Settlement, where "She dreamed of a beautiful country, – a land, it seemed, to her of rest . . . and there, in a house which kind voices told her was a home, she saw her boy playing, a free and happy child" (*UTC* 121). Eliza awakes to find herself (temporarily) safe in the home of the Quakers, "her child . . . calmly sleeping by her side," and "her husband sobbing by her pillow" (*UTC* 121). Her dream suggests that this "beautiful country" where she and her family can find "a home" is not the United States, as her later flight to Canada confirms. Though Stowe's narration of Eliza and George Harris' emigration becomes a rather patriarchal account once they are reunited ("what a blessing it is for a man to feel that his wife and child belong to *him!*"), with Stowe attributing the larger voice to George's political ruminations rather than Eliza's thoughts for the remainder of the novel, the image of Eliza as both a fugitive and a mother remain in the foreground of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (*UTC* 161). A significant fact is that it was not Eliza herself but her son, Harry, who had been sold. The image not only of an enslaved woman, but of a mother to an enslaved child therefore becomes the definitive conveyer of literary abolitionist sentiment. I will return to Mary King's relation to this facet of the mixed-race heroine in my final section.

"The story of the *Quadroon* girl"

When William Allen reads the mixed-race heroine, it is not the popular image of Eliza that sparks his interest. Rather, his reading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* focuses on Cassy, the "quadroon" woman whose more radical place in the text is often overshadowed by popular focus

on Eliza. While Porter reads Mary King as somehow more like Eliza than the normative model of white womanhood, Allen shows how we might also read King in the tradition of Cassy. As Allen relates his impression of the recently-published *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in a May 1852 letter to *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, he writes, "The story of the **Quadroon** girl, second book, thirty-fourth chapter, exceeds anything that I have ever read, in all that is soul-searching and thrilling." It is with Cassy that Allen seems to best identify, as he holds Tom as having "too much piety" and offers a familiar critique of the colonization chapter describing the ultimate fate of Eliza and George Harris. Allen writes, "I believe, as you do, that it is not light the slaveholder wants, but *fire*, and he ought to have it. I do not advocate revenge, but simply, resistance to tyrants, if it need be, to the death."¹¹⁸ Nobody responds to the tyranny of slavery with so much "*fire*" as Cassy, whose ghostly revenge on Simon Legree is unequalled in the novel. It makes sense that, though seemingly forgotten by moderate abolitionist whites, Cassy would be a memorable character for radical abolitionists. Although Cassy is described as being visibly white as Eliza, her vehement – often violent – opposition to her and her children's enslavement presents her as a more dangerous figure than Eliza. Though Eliza's resistance is characterized by a bravery that is inspired by motherly affection and which continually places herself in danger, Cassy is not averse to harming her white enslavers (be it physically or psychologically), if necessary.

Although Cassy's story offers a familiar, generic narrative of the "tragic" mixed-race heroine, she nonetheless defies this literary trope (as Eliza also does), in part because she does not die at the end of her narrative, but instead escapes her final master and is later reunited with her living children. In this, Cassy seems ahead of her time. She simultaneously evokes more radical abolitionist texts than Stowe's, such as Richard Hildreth's *The Slave: or Memoirs of Archy Moore* (1836) and anticipates post-war narratives of race and reunion, such as Lydia

¹¹⁸ Letter from Wm Allen. *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, May 20, 1852.

Maria Child's *Romance of the Republic* (1867), and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's *Minnie's Sacrifice* (1869) and *Iola Leroy; or, Shadows Uplifted* (1892).¹¹⁹ Despite Cassy's radical presence in the text, Leslie Fiedler argues that Cassy's story "fades from the mind even after we have just read *Uncle Tom*" and Carolyn Vellenga Berman adds that Cassy often goes unmentioned in both early reviews of the novel and in the recent history Stowe scholarship.¹²⁰ Writing on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has closely attended to the debates that surrounded the text's reception in 1852 and 1853 – a debate that, though inflected by various positions of gender, nation, region, class, and race, has often prioritized the white, middle-class abolitionist readership with which Stowe's writing is usually associated. Although contemporary and critical African-Americanist perspectives on Stowe have garnered more attention in recent scholarship, discussions of these perspectives often center around critiques of Stowe's views on colonization or her stereotypical depictions of black characters.

A more radical employment of Stowe's mixed-race characters and construction of sentiment emerges, however, when we more closely examine the complexities of non-white readerly responses to Stowe's novel. As Martin Delaney argued of Stowe, "she knows nothing about us, the free colored people of the United States."¹²¹ However, these "free colored" people were among Stowe's earliest readers. The significance of Cassy in Allen's reading of Stowe, then, may lie in his readerly position as a free, northern, racially-mixed man; a radical abolitionist; an anti-colonizationist; an integrationist; and an "amalgamationist." When this position of readership is taken into account, it is just as unsurprising that Allen finds Cassy's

¹¹⁹ Although Stowe fails to mention Hildreth's *The Slave* in her *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Charles Nichols has argued, convincingly, that this text was a probable source (i.e., "the real source") for her novel. See Charles Nichols, "The Origins of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," *The Phylon Quarterly* 19 (Fall 1958): 328-34.

¹²⁰ Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel*. (New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1992), 265. Carolyn Vellenga Berman, "Creole Family Politics in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*," *NOVEL* (Summer 2000): 329.

¹²¹ Martin Delany, letter in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 6 May 1853.

story particularly striking as it is that the increasingly-popular discussion of Stowe's novel finds its way into Allen's narrative. While a more moderate abolitionist readership may readily allow Eliza's story to subsume Cassy's, it makes sense that Stowe's African American readers – especially those who readily critiqued the colonizationist ending of her novel – might also recall the single character who enacts a ghostly revenge on Simon Legree, the embodiment of the larger slave system in which “Uncle Tom” shows ultimately invest the entirety of that system and all its evils. My attention to Allen's emphasis on Cassy suggests that it matters whether any single reader of Stowe more closely identifies with George Harris, Cassy, or even Topsy, rather than with the Shelbys, the Birds, or Aunt Ophelia. Critics of abolitionist literature, in particular, ought take the possibility of such readerly positions into account.

The structure in which Mary King resembles the generic trope of Stowe's Eliza can be explained by the same structure by which Cassy would become a memorable figure in white readings of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Both matters have to do with the relation of race to reading practices. By this I do *not* mean that these practices are dependent upon the race of the reader, but refer to the practices by which race, itself, is read. William Allen's interest in Cassy seems exceptional when read next to the predominantly white readerly responses to the novel, i.e., it can be contrasted against the failure of white readers to identify with Cassy, or with assumptions that mixed-race characters would be better able to garner white sympathy than black ones, particularly if they support colonization. John Porter's suggestion of identifying Mary King with Eliza Harris points to a different readerly response, and the possibility for cross-racial identification with Stowe's enslaved characters.

By reading Allen and King's story in relation to those of Stowe's “quadroon” heroines, Eliza and Cassy, we escape the underpinnings of the “moderate,” persistently racial separatist

brand of abolitionism with which Stowe's novel concludes for the more "radical" readings that characters such as Eliza and Cassy have to offer Stowe's readers. As Porter's letter and Allen's emphasis suggest, the possibilities for interracial identification go beyond the simple equation that white identification or sympathy depends upon the Other's proximity to whiteness (either in visual description, education, or ability to be assimilated in some version of American nationalism). Both King's rejection of white male patriarchy and her articulation of interracial kinship here foster that kind of identification, and better inform any reading of Allen's narrative.

Despite the fact that she is never in danger of actual legal enslavement, Mary King is forcibly confined in the attempt to separate her from Allen. King declares her devotion to her fiancé and distress at the prevention of their marriage, twice calling herself a "prisoner" held captive and under surveillance by family members who would prevent her marriage (77). King's narrative of imprisonment also informs us that she has been deemed a transgressor against the white racist society that holds her, and is therefore in need of either punishment or pardon. The "Committee" that first approaches Allen and King upon the mob's arrival escorts King to her father's house, and addresses her in these terms. Allen recounts that one member of the group "advised her also to go around among the ladies of the village, and consult with them, and assured her that he would be glad to see her at his house." Allen tells us that the "tone" of this speech is what evokes King's indignation: "The speaker evidently thought the young lady would receive it all as a mark of gracious favor, and as assuring her that though she had been 'hand and glove' with a coloured man, he would nevertheless condescend to overlook it" (59).

The mob's suggestion that King would either welcome or require the "gracious" pardon of white racists for her racial/sexual transgression is countered with King's indignation, her continued profession of love for Allen, and her ultimate state of fugitivity. She and Allen

eventually leave the United States to avoid racial persecution – at a time when other African Americans figure as fugitive slaves, either avoiding captivity in the North or, when possible, escaping to Canada or Europe where they do not face the very real risk of re-enslavement. King’s response refuses the mob’s placement of her as either a captive “damsel” or a repentant transgressor of white racist codes, but insists that these white captors or pardoners are her personal adversaries.

The matter of rejecting the white racism that these accounts would foist upon her is truly personal for King and to ascribe these views to her is to significantly change her story. While the “prejudice against color” that is primarily directed at Allen is willing to “pardon” King, it does so only at the expense of recasting her in racist terms: as a racial-purist “damsel,” rather than a race-traitor. “The Fulton Rescue Case” article evokes a letter of response to the *Syracuse Journal* from Mary King’s brother, William S. King, in which he “describes Miss King as repulsing [Allen] with her abhorrence of the idea of amalgamation” (74). In this account, King (very cordially) thrice rejects Allen’s repeated proposals of marriage, as her brother attests that “she had always expressed her abhorrence of the idea of amalgamation” (75). In a weak attempt to support this claim, Allen also receives – and rejects the validity of – a letter (written not in Mary King’s hand, but in her sister’s, as she is allegedly too ill to write) breaking off the engagement.

We see here that assumptions of King’s capacity for loving Allen become a question of the capacity for interracial sexual desire that her would-be “rescuers” attribute to her. That is, white racist assumptions about King and Allen’s relationship predicate the impossibility of her sexual desire for him while admitting his desire for her and reframing it negatively, against her supposed inability to reciprocate that desire. A surprising letter to King’s father from Thomas Knowland, a Mississippi slaveholder whom Allen calls a “specimen of Southern chivalry,” asks

permission to correspond with Mary King. Like the “rescue” mob, Knowland regards King as having “escaped” from an “ignominious connection” with Allen. Further, he tells Mr. King, “Your daughter [is] – innocent, as I must in charity presume – because deluded and deranged by the false teachings of the abolition Institute at McGrawville” (86). Echoing Shakespeare’s Brabantio, who claims that Othello must have used some kind of “magic” to sway Desdemona’s emotions (1.2.65), Knowland is unwilling to assume that King could reasonably desire marriage to a black man, but insists that she must have been “deluded and deranged” – brainwashed by abolitionists (who “must” also be amalgamationists).

This version of events does not square with the rest of Allen’s narrative, of course. Allen makes it clear that his feelings toward King had always been “fully reciprocated” (43) and reproduces letters in which King assures him of her continued love and devotion during their separation (76-77, 90). Reading the first letter he receives from King following their separation, Allen attests to his fiancée’s devotion, writing that “Miss King, – though she could be persecuted – could not be crushed” (77). He further recalls the emotional difficulty King must have endured, his ever deeper feelings for her “after she had passed through that fiery furnace of affliction,” and calls her continuance of their engagement “a moral heroism” (79). King’s continued devotion to Allen is framed by placing her in this precarious, fugitive position – that of both estrangement from the white community and susceptibility to physical danger from it – a position which Porter’s comparison likens to the state of people who are in danger of legal enslavement.

Like the Harrises and Cassy’s family, Allen and King eventually decide to emigrate from the United States in order to secure their own safety – and the safety of their future family. King’s position becomes more precarious still when read in light of the possibility of her

motherhood. The fact that interracial sexual desire can lead to the literal embodiment of racial mixture places the white woman involved in interracial sexual relations in a precarious position: her sexual encounter may result in the literal (re)production of the racial “Other,” as the children she bears from such encounters will not be designated “white” like herself. The potential for bearing racially mixed – that is, legally black – children adds another dimension to King’s fugitivity.¹²²

Extending her fugitivity to the non-white children that she would later bear, Cassy’s motherhood – and especially, the infanticide of her last child because she is unwilling to see it suffer in slavery – is particularly poignant. Keeping in mind Stowe’s appeals to white mothers to compare enslaved children to their own, King is in the particular position of a white woman whose children are not necessarily safe from potential enslavement, as the Fugitive Slave Act poses a threat even to free-born African-Americans, and as the ideology of hypodescent would have it, partial-whiteness is negligible. Harriet Jacobs, in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), challenges the ability of white mothers to fully sympathize with the plight of the enslaved mother and her experience of reunion with her children as she asks, “O reader, can you imagine my joy? No, you cannot, unless you have been a slave mother.”¹²³ This text reminds us of the difference – a difference that cannot be over-emphasized – between Mary King’s position and that of women who are, themselves, enslaved. My next chapter will deal explicitly with the condition of enslaved mothers and matters of interracial kinship with regard to explicitly-racialized maternity.

¹²²Barbara J. Fields cites the concept of “interracial” motherhood in her discussion of the absurdity of biologically-construed race, referring to “the well-known anomaly of American racial convention that considers a white woman capable of giving birth to a black child but denies that a black woman can give birth to a white child.” See “Ideology and Race in American History” in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction* Ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 149. I will discuss interracial motherhood at length in the following chapter.

¹²³ See Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Ed. Nellie Y. McKay and Frances Smith Foster. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2001), 135.

Apart from the extreme threat of the enslavement of free African Americans, King and Allen's mixed-race family is unwanted in their white community, as a Western New York paper announcing their marriage makes explicit when it comments, sarcastically, "It is well they should emigrate, to show admiring foreigners the beauties of abolitionism" (81-82). King comes to articulate her own fugitivity with relation to the white community in her letters. Though initially offered "protection" and possible "pardon" from the white mob, in a letter written just before her elopement, King speaks not only to estrangement from the white community, but to the danger of physical violence to herself: "should the public or my friends ever see fit to lay their commands upon me again, they will find that although they have but a weak, defenseless woman to contend with, still, that woman is one who will never passively yield her rights. *They may mob me; yea, they may kill me; but they shall never crush me*" (90). In this defiance of the threat of white male violence, King displays something resembling the "*fire*" that Allen attributes to Cassy. However, we would do well to note that King has not yet experienced the feelings of being "crushed" that Cassy has when we first encounter her in Stowe's novel as a woman who has been enslaved, sexually coerced if not forcibly raped, separated from her living children, and who has committed infanticide to save another child from the horrors of enslavement that she has determined unbearable. Mary King is not simply like an enslaved mixed-race woman, but rather practices of reading race liken her to enslaved mixed-race women in popular fiction. This process reveals how her "interracial" kinship ties to William Allen (and their potential children) bring racialized and genre-based reading practices to bear on Mary King's whiteness.

Rethinking Mary King's generic function in Allen's narrative allows us to understand John Porter's reframing of the "white woman" as he compares King with Stowe's Eliza. Although the familiar characterizations of white femininity evidenced in literary genres such as

the captivity narrative, anti-abolitionist writing, and anti-amalgamation writing are central to understanding how nineteenth-century literary texts challenge Western notions of race and racialization, *King* is not best understood through these literary tropes. I am thinking especially of abolitionist literature's ubiquitous depictions of mixed-race characters ("tragic" and otherwise), which challenge the claims of racial essentialism central to political systems (systems that govern enslavement, marriage, citizenship, etc.) that are dependent upon the differentiation of "white" people from people who are not "white." Allen's narrative pastiche allows us to read *King* through different literary genres comparatively. If unraveling the imagined sexual threat of the black man and registering the real threat of white male patriarchy aligns *King* with Stowe's mixed-race heroines rather than with the popular model of the white "damsel," these generic characterizations indicate how racialization is, itself, a literary practice.

Chapter Four

Mothers and Mammies: Reading Racialized Maternity

*Rear'd not beneath a parent's eye,
A stranger to each kindred tie,
On who but thee can I rely,*

My Mammy.

M. Belson (Mary Elliot?), "My Mammy"
Grateful Tributes; or Recollections of Infancy, 1819

In her 1872 poem, "The Black Princess," Sarah Piatt describes a Southern woman's nostalgic reminiscence of her mammy. Fixing this figure in an idealized childhood, the poem reads, initially, as glorifying the mammy's apparent grace and beauty.

Court lace nor jewels had she seen:
She wore a precious smile, so rare
That at her side the whitest queen
Were dark – her darkness was so fair.

Nothing of loveliest loveliness
This strange, sad Princess seemed to lack;
Majestic with her calm distress
She was, and beautiful, though black.

However, the poem's evaluation of the "Princess's" "lovely" appearance accompanies what is revealed as rather backhanded praise, dependent upon negatively-racialized descriptions of blackness. As we read that "her darkness was so fair" and she was "beautiful, though black," it becomes apparent that blackness functions here only in negative terms, with these compliments given not in praise of black beauty, but only in spite of this woman's black skin. Resembling the black/white imagery of William Blake's poem "The Little Black Boy," "The Black Princess," gives its readers a familiar impression of a black person's honorary and obligatory "whitening" in heaven.

More interestingly, in the poem's last lines, we read not only the adult speaker's qualified reverence for this figure, but also her belief in the genuine nature of her mammy's love for the white child she has raised. So great does this speaker suppose her mammy's love was for the white child that it extends even from death, as the "black princess" longs for that child even from the place of her eternal reward in heaven:

And in her Father's house beyond,
They gave her beauty, robe, and crown:
On me, I think, far, faint and fond,
Her eyes to-day look, yearning, down.¹²⁴

What we read in these last lines is an astoundingly myopic image of black womanhood, which is unlikely to resemble the lived experiences of real women's servitude. It may well be the case that Piatt's speaker really did love her mammy, and that her mammy loved her. Nevertheless, however deep we might understand the affections between a "black mammy" continually "yearning" for the white child even while "in her Father's house beyond" her condition of earthly enslavement, the inherent violence of slavery and the power relations implicit in black feminine domestic servitude mark the mammy-child relationship as always suspect in its inability to be completely and equally reciprocal.

Although the word "mammy" originally seemed to function rather innocently as a diminutive of "mother," by the nineteenth century it had come to designate a relationship explicitly *other* than biological motherhood, applied to wet-nurses or foster-mothers. Most prominently, the *Oxford English Dictionary* acknowledges the particularly racialized figure of the mammy in the United States, referring explicitly to its common usage from the nineteenth

¹²⁴ Sarah Morgan Bryan Piatt, "The Black Princess (A True Fable of My Old Kentucky Nurse.);" Original in *The Independent*, 1872. Reprinted in *Palace-Burner: The Selected Poetry of Sarah Piatt*. Ed. Paula Bernat Bennett. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001.

century through the twenty-first as “a black woman with responsibility for the care of white children.”¹²⁵ While this definition acknowledges the position of black women as servants in white homes, the history of black women’s enslavement in the American South further complicates this figure. In their glorification of white children’s relations with black women, popular depictions of the mammy, like Piatt’s, often refuse to acknowledge existing racial power structures by which these women were either enslaved or employed by white families. Referring to a tenor not dissimilar from Piatt’s poem, Sterling Brown calls Thomas Nelson Page’s idealization of the mammy as a regional and national figure “honest if child-like,” adding that “I am sure that he loved his mammy to death.”¹²⁶ In this, Brown recognizes that depictions of the mammy often mask the racialized violence to which black women were often subjected. In this masking, the figure of the mammy has been perpetuated well beyond the antebellum period, functioning to promote national regional and racial reconciliation, as well as post-bellum white supremacy.¹²⁷ Because of her unique position as the caretaker of children, the mammy is embedded in a set of complex power relations, in which the power structure between adult and child or enslaved and (current or future) enslaver cannot be easily explained.

As an iconic figure of American literature and culture, the visual image of the black mammy is most commonly-associated with cultural figures from Aunt Chloe in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to Hattie McDaniel in the 1940 film, *Gone With the Wind*. (See Figures 14 and 15) In this iconic visual image of portly, big-breasted, dark-skinned, smiling, desexualized women, we see one of if not the single most hypervisible image of African American

¹²⁵ “Mammy,” n. *Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 1989. *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. 29 October 2009. <<http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/display/00300777?keytype=ref&ijkey=QzWAQAox/JAmw>>.

¹²⁶ See Brown, “The Muted South,” *Callaloo* 21. 4 (Autumn 1998): 768. [originally published in *Phylon* 6 (Winter 1945): 22-34.]

¹²⁷ One example of this use of the mammy figure is the Daughters of the Confederacy’s attempt erect a National Mammy memorial on the national mall in Washington, DC in 1923.

womanhood. The mammy becomes a stereotypically derogatory image in this hypervisibility, as its persistent presence tends to mask other versions and experiences of African American womanhood, including the realities of both the sexual exploitation of enslaved African American women and the history of their resistance to white supremacy.¹²⁸ In addition, the figure of the mammy masks the lived experience of African American women *as mothers* – i.e., as women who, their respective relationships to their white charges aside, are not coerced or paid for the love and care they give to their own children. Under this mask, the mammy's biological children are more often figured as absented or neglected out of necessity for the mammy's care of the white children who demand prioritization.



Figure 14: Aunt Chloe and Mrs. Shelby, Engraving by Hammatt Billings
Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1853)

¹²⁸ Writers such as Catherine Clinton and Patricia A. Turner argue that the iconic cultural version of the mammy is more a product of mythic depictions of the American South following the Civil War than of the reality of enslaved black women during the antebellum period. They indicate that only the wealthiest white people could afford to keep house servants, and point to the fact that the majority of house servants were racially-mixed people who did not resemble the dark-skinned caricature of the mammy. See Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 201-202. Patricia A. Turner, *Ceramic Uncles & Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and Their Influence on Culture* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994), 44.



Figure 15: Hattie McDaniel as Mammy in *Gone With the Wind*, 1939
<<http://www.gonemovies.com/www/drama/drama/GoneMammy1.asp>>

This chapter resists parsing the particular distinctions of racialized motherhood in order to examine slippages between the corresponding literary/cultural figures of the mother and the mammy, particularly in narratives which rearticulate motherhood or mammyhood when the racial definition or identification of these characters becomes unclear. I will discuss how these slippages between mother and mammy relations are, themselves, informed by racial figurings which, when changed or changeable, make the racialized mother/mammy distinction itself, unclear. Motherhood and mammyhood are racialized kinship relations in these texts. That is, they are relationships in which either the kinship of (usually biological) motherhood or the assumed near-kinship of mammyhood are defined by racial identification and difference in the narratives discussed here.

As the familiar law of the Virginia colony tells us, “*Partus sequitur ventrem*. The child follows the condition of the mother.”¹²⁹ This law speaks to how both enslavement and legal racial identification were formally dependent upon a child’s racial identification with her mother, regardless of the father’s race. Moreover, it shows us how maternity becomes a force for racialization in nineteenth-century American literatures. The dual workings of the figures of the mother and the mammy are manifest in the emphases of biological and non-biological kinship relations of mothering. Kimberly Wallace-Sanders regards “the mammy’s characterization as biological *and* surrogate mother” in American cultural representations, within the context of a national, white patriarchy.¹³⁰ This discussion will focus on figures of intertwined motherhood and mammyhood and the ways these figures construct the image of the mixed-race mother in relation to both notions of idealized white motherhood and the stereotype of the black mammy. In truth, while the mammy does not physically resemble models of white womanhood in these iconic imaginings, this figure does have some role in preserving whiteness through its reproduction. The figure of the mammy as a happy and loyal caregiver to white children reproduces whiteness to the extent that she raises – and helps to racialize – white citizens who may later grow up to realize and act upon the racialized power structures that govern their relation to this maternal figure.

Ultimately, examining problems of race and representation central to constructing the figure of the mammy indicates how this figure is more fluid than in usual renderings of the derogatory stereotype, both positioned against and able to perform notions of what is posited as an exclusively “white” motherhood. As Thomas Nelson Page writes, “She [Mammy] was far

¹²⁹ Virginia Common Law, Act XII, Dec. 1662.

¹³⁰ See Wallace-Sanders, *Mammy*, 8. I am more interested in the ways that racial and kinship identifications converge in the texts I discuss, which tend to prioritize biological kinship relations, even while these are complicated by instances of “interracial” kinship that are often articulated through bonds of maternity.

more than a servant. She was a member of the family in high-standing and of unquestioned influence. She was her mistress's coadjutress and her wise adviser, and where the children were concerned she was next to her in authority." Here Page suggests an idealized comparison – but, importantly, not an equation – of the mother's and the mammy's maternal roles.¹³¹ Drawing attention to the ties of race and kinship that drive stories about mothers and mothering and mammies and "mammying" illuminates both the complexities of race and racial mixture at work in these texts and the ways race remains dependent upon the particular articulation of kinship relations.

The texts discussed in this chapter share a similar theme in their presentation of the combined or ambiguous figure of the mammy/mother as central for structuring both kinship relations and racial identification, but they treat these intersecting figures (and the extent and nature of their intersection) to different ends. First I read Charles Chesnutt's short story, "Her Virginia Mammy," (1899) in order to introduce the categories of mother and mammy as not only interrelated, but overlapping in texts invested in a national history of both race-based enslavement and racial mixture. Chesnutt's revision of the plantation nostalgia image of the mammy illustrates how the distinctions between the racialized categories of mother and mammy are blurred by African American authors. Next, I will explain how Roxy, the mammy/mother of Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894), challenges the barriers of kinship and racial relations as she shifts between performing both roles to the same child. As a mother/mammy figure, Roxy's mixed race reflects upon the ambiguity of her maternal relationships, challenging assumptions about biological motherhood.

What these texts share, in their retrospective presentations of antebellum narratives, is their clear positioning against the sentimental celebrations of plantation life, as represented in the

¹³¹ Thomas Nelson Page, "The Old-Time Negro," *Scribner's Magazine* 36 (July-December 1904): 525.

novels of Thomas Nelson Page and Thomas Dixon, and in the poetry of Sarah Piatt – writers who tend to depict what has now become a stereotypically derogatory version of the “black mammy,” one rather similar to the image so adored in Chesnutt’s story. Chesnutt does not simply reproduce this image however, but revises it in his narrative, and Twain similarly calls into question the very notions of racialization and biological maternity that figure his central character. While Page is claiming that “no one can describe what the Mammy was, and only those can apprehend her who were rocked on her bed, fed at her table, were directed by her unsleeping eye, and led by her precept in the way of truth, justice, and humanity,” these authors are already complicating the figure of the mammy in texts which expose versions of this figure such as Page’s and Piatt’s as mere caricatures.¹³²

Her Virginia Mother

In Chesnutt’s “Her Virginia Mammy” the orphaned Clara Hohlfelder seeks familial roots beyond her adoptive parents, to whom she has never felt a sufficiently close bond. Chesnutt’s response to the popular genre of plantation nostalgia fiction shows that Clara finds especial comfort not only in the revelation of her biological connections to the “first families of Virginia,” but also in the emotional encounter with her own “Virginia Mammy” of the story’s title.¹³³ During the chance meeting that reveals the familial ties Clara had been hoping for, it is the “mammy” – Mrs. Harper – who provides the missing details of Clara’s parents’ lives, the

¹³² Thomas Nelson Page, “The Old-Time Negro,” 525.

¹³³ Like the other texts I discuss in this chapter and the next, Charles Chesnutt’s “Her Virginia Mammy” is best defined, perhaps, against what it is not: the plantation nostalgia genre, a Southern strand of what David Blight calls the diverse “literature of reunion,” which emerges at the closing of the war and builds with the failure of Reconstruction to produce a unified nation. The pastoral vein of this largely-sentimental literature employs the historical fiction of antebellum white Southern benevolence and loyal slaves to promote national regional and/or racial reconciliation (and often to argue for postbellum white supremacy). See David W. Blight’s discussion southern plantation nostalgia and other post-war literature in *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 211-254.

shipwreck by which they were separated, the supposed death of the lost child, and her own re-enslavement, which kept her from immediately restoring Clara to her “people.” She tells Clara, “Yes, child, I was – your mammy. Upon my bosom you have rested; my breasts once gave you nourishment; my hands once ministered to you; my arms sheltered you, and my heart loved you and mourned you like a mother loves and mourns a firstborn.”¹³⁴ These lines serve as the revelation of kinship for which Clara has been longing.

While “their name and their blood” are all that Clara’s parents seem to have left her, the encounter with her “dear Virginia mammy” is sufficient to fill Clara’s yearning for the “kith or kin” she had previously thought herself without (94-95). Despite the fact that Clara is left with no chance of ever reuniting with any of her biological kin, the meeting of mammy and child is framed clearly in terms of kinship rather than as a meeting between Clara and a mere former-servant of her family. Importantly, this kinship seems enough for Clara. As the two women kiss, “One put into her embrace all of her new-found joy, the other all the suppressed feeling of the last half hour, which in turn embodied the unsatisfied yearning of many years” (93). The image Chesnutt provides is that of a mother and child, reunited.

From these details, it is possible to gather something about the complexities of kinship in Clara’s nostalgic view of race-relations in the Old South – a South that never was, except in antebellum pro-slavery arguments of white patriarchal benevolence and the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century plantation narratives that these arguments continued to inform. In Clara’s nostalgic imagination – an imagination that has evidently been informed by positive images of slavery in the antebellum South – the plantation system extends an umbrella of kinship to the enslaved people who interact closely with the families they serve. The fact that Clara recognizes

¹³⁴ Charles Chesnutt, “Her Virginia Mammy,” (1899) in *The Northern Stories of Charles W. Chesnutt*, Ed. Charles Duncan (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2004), 93. Further references to this story will be given parenthetically in the text.

her “Virginia mammy” as a sufficient kinship relation to fill the void left by an adopted mother (who she, herself, admits “could not have loved me better or cared for me more faithfully had I been her own child,” but to whom she has always felt “a subtle difference,”) reveals the significance of the idealized mammy relation (82).

Although “mammy” had come to designate a relationship explicitly *other* than biological motherhood by the mid-nineteenth century, connotations of familiarity (often associated with childhood) are retained in the term. This familiarity, confounded with childhood memories of love and care, remind us of the term’s historical use by children as an appellation of genuine affection. As enslaved or employed women performed the duties of early childcare, (and for children whose affections to their primary caregivers might not yet have been imbued with the racism inherent to Southern plantation slavery,) the antebellum era presents the mammy-child relationship as one of close proximity to (or, at times, even closer than) the mother-child relation.

The violence of slavery and the power relations implicit in black feminine domestic servitude, however, mark the mammy-child relationship as suspect, always imbued with the stain of racial hierarchy. However deep we might understand the affections between “black mammy” and “white child,” American racial formation is founded on assumptions of racial essentialism that prevent any conflation of the duties of white biological kinship with relations between “white” masters and “black” slaves or servants, (regardless of any biological relations between them.) That is, even as the term “mammy” suggested the false “family” of plantation slavery, it also denied any conflation of that relation with the clearly recognized familial obligations between white kinfolk.

Clara does not doubt Mrs. Harper’s likening of the mammy to the biological mother, however, as she describes her care and love as maternal. She regards her “mammy’s”

performance of these mothering acts as sincere enough to justify feelings of kinship between the respective “black” and “white” women. In effect, the “mammy’s” performance of motherhood is able to produce a shared affect of kinship in a way that adoptive motherhood cannot in Clara’s view. In this respect, it is important that Clara’s “Virginia Mammy” is not simply a servant of her family, but was, during Clara’s youth, enslaved by them. A “familial” model of plantation slavery is therefore essential to Clara’s understanding of the mammy. Mrs. Harper’s affection, in this light, is explained through popular assumptions about the patriarchal system of slavery by which slaves are interpolated under the guise of kinship relations that rendered enslaved people as “Uncle,” “Aunt,” or “Mammy.”

Kimberly Wallace-Sanders describes the mammy figure of nineteenth-century American culture as “a mother who frequently displaces white mothers and has ambiguous relationships with her own children.”¹³⁵ In the particular familiarity of the mammy relation, this figure is sometimes usurped the more distant white mother, rendering white women’s relationships with their own children equally “ambiguous.” Clara embraces this displacement as she romanticizes the mammy-child relationship, interpreting the labor of the breasts that nourish, the hands that minister, and the arms that shelter as labors of love, rather than those of a hired or enslaved body. Clara accepts the affection of the woman she believes to have been her family’s “colored nurse” at face value: Never does it occur to her that the violence and white supremacy of Southern slavery might influence a black woman’s feelings toward her white charges, nor does she think about her mammy’s relationship with or obligations to her own biological children.

The familial appellations of plantation slavery imply a false structure of kinship between enslaved people and the people who hold them enslaved, but they also subtly acknowledge a

¹³⁵ Kimberly Wallace-Sanders. *Mammy: A Century of Race, Gender, and Southern Memory*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 8.

system in which many enslaved people were biologically-related to their enslavers. The presumably inherent division between “mammy” and “mother” is therefore ironic in light of the biological ties that are known to have existed between masters and enslaved people under the system of plantation slavery. In this respect, kinship appellations such as “Aunt” and “Mammy” subtly acknowledge a system that is distinctly unable to maintain the racial barriers on which its legality is based.¹³⁶ In the case of “Her Virginia Mammy,” though, the intimate relationship between mammy and child approximates that of mother and child in Clara’s imaginings. Clara does not need an acknowledgement of blood relation to explain her connection to the older woman who she so closely resembles, but ironically – or perhaps, fittingly – the emotional encounter between Clara and Mrs. Harper is heightened by the fact she is revealed to be the real mother for whom Clara has been yearning.

Everyone except Clara – the reader, Chesnutt’s narrator, Mrs. Harper, and Clara’s fiancé, Dr. Winthrop – recognize the family resemblance between the two women, though Mrs. Harper chooses not to reveal the secret that would re-figure Clara’s understanding of her own whiteness. Winthrop, too, remains silent rather than upset his fiancée’s fantasy, fully understanding her beliefs about the importance of inherited “name” and “blood,” while confirming that he does not care much about these himself. These metaphors of race are symbols of Clara’s investment in white womanhood insofar as they serve for her as a sort of dowry – the only “property” that she brings to her marriage. They matter little, however, when Clara’s surname will be lost as she assumes her husband’s in marriage and as her racial genealogy is more likely to remain hidden because she is not even aware of her own passing.

¹³⁶ For a case study of nineteenth-century assumptions about racial essentialism within a race-based system of slavery, see Walter Johnson “The Slave-Trader, the White Slave, and the Politics of Racial Determination in the 1850s,” *The Journal of American History* 87 (2000): 13-38.

Clara's naïve assumption that Mrs. Harper was "the colored nurse" and not the wife and mother described in her story, speaks to Clara's inability to escape essentialist notions of racial determination, despite her experience teaching "colored" dance pupils of various shades, some of whom "were undistinguishable from pure white" (85). Because Clara's mother, Mrs. Harper tells her, "also belonged to one of the first families of Virginia and in her veins flowed some of the best blood of the Old Dominion," Clara assumes that her mother was white in the conventional, essentialist, and legal sense. Although Clara does not understand, Mrs. Harper alludes here to racial intermixture within these Southern "white" families in her claim, complicating not only Clara's but her own race beyond black-white dualism (92).

In light of the complications interracial kinship brings to a story about mammies and mothers, Chesnutt's piece does more than just "ironize" blood, as Eric Sundquist suggests.¹³⁷ It challenges the prioritization of biology for determining either race or kinship, complicating the ways in which both race and kinship are simultaneously enacted. Mrs. Harper's performance of the "mammy" role to her own biological daughter necessitates a racial performance, as well – one that perpetuates Clara's nostalgic imagining of this figure. One irony of this scene is that while this biological mother's love is real, her participation in the racial stereotype of "mammyhood" simultaneously reinscribes her own race under essentialist terms. As Mrs. Harper allows her daughter to "pass" for white (while not even acknowledging that she is doing so), she also allows her own maternal love for her biological child to be filtered through the lens of the apparent racial servitude of the mammy's devotion. What Chesnutt's story so deftly shows us is how easy the slippage between "mother" and "mammy" might be when notions of race, itself, remain malleable.

¹³⁷ Eric Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature*. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1993), 401.

Reading Roxy, the Mammy/Mother of Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson*

Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* further emphasizes the racialization of (white) "mother" and (black) "mammy" tropes.¹³⁸ Through its heroine, Roxy, Twain's text shows how this racialization itself is complicated by a racially-mixed woman who is able to simultaneously embody both roles. Roxana, the white-looking, though enslaved mother of Valet de Chambre and mammy to Thomas à Becket Driscoll (more commonly referred to as "Roxy") is at the center of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*'s complex story. In Roxy, Twain re-figures the "tragic mulatta" trope, fashioning a character whose agency and tragedy work differently in the text than in earlier iterations of mixed-race womanhood.

Wallace-Sanders correctly observes that "neither Roxy nor Mrs. Harper is a stereotypical mammy figure" and argues further that "both mammy characters fall into a uniquely hybrid stereotype, the mulatto mammy . . . a fascinating mixture of the two well-known stereotypes: the mammy and the tragic mulatto."¹³⁹ This hybrid category of the "mulatto mammy," is not especially useful for discussing the complexities of kinship in Twain's text, however, where notions of biological and legal kinship determine identification along dualistic lines of race. Roxy (like other late-century mixed-race figures such as Iola Leroy and their abolitionist heroine foremothers, Stowe's Eliza Harris and William Wells Brown's Clotel,) embodies the contradiction of a race-based system of slavery that does not reflect the realities of racial mixture and ambiguity which are, themselves, a direct result of the patriarchal plantation system.

¹³⁸ Any clear distinction between mother and mammy figures is admittedly confused by the affectionate usages of the term "mammy" to denote African American mothers. I will discuss one such ambiguous use in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* below. I am also thinking here of the use of the "mammy" in Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's *Iola Leroy*, which I will discuss in the following chapter.

¹³⁹ See Wallace-Sanders, *Mammy*, 73.

Mark Twain ruminates on the contradiction of Roxy's race throughout the narration of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. It is necessary to emphasize Twain's narration of Roxy's mixed race here because her equally-mixed racialized maternity is dependent upon this in the novel. Though the essentialist beliefs of Twain's characters are evident and unsurprising, Twain's narrator seems unconvinced by conventional notions of how any amount of "black blood" serves to race Roxy or her child as "black." We read that Roxy's child, "thirty-one parts white . . . too, was a slave, and by a fiction of law and custom a negro."¹⁴⁰ While Twain's narrator does not seem entirely convinced that either Roxy or her child is *really* "a negro," Twain's plot depends upon the notion that there *are* both "negroes" and "whites," though it may be argued that he paints racial difference not as essential, but as created through socially-constructed inequality.

But in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Roxy's mixed-race embodiment is not a simple tragedy in itself. The enslaved woman is mammy to one child and biological mother to another, nursing and rearing the child of her master alongside (or even instead of) her own. Moreover, two children Roxy tends are virtually identical, undistinguishable from one another by anyone other than Roxy, the person closest to them both. This unique knowledge of the children is what allows Roxy to switch the boys' places, in the action that sparks the novel's identity-driven plot. In this act of changing the boys' identities, Roxy's relation to them changes, as well. Her position, as mother to one child and mammy to the other is what enacts the boys' changing identities. Initially, at least, it is through their respective relations to Roxy that each child assumes his identity as either white and free or black and enslaved.

¹⁴⁰ Mark Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. [1894] ed. Sidney E. Berger. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 9. Further references to the novel will be given parenthetically in the text.

The fact of these changes in identity challenge the notions of kinship through which racial identity and belonging are constructed and enacted.¹⁴¹ Twain's emphasis on Roxy's racial mixture causes Wallace-Sanders to read Roxy as belonging to the hybrid literary type of the "mulatto mammy" (17). If characters such as Roxy and Mrs. Harper are hybrid figures, though, the most compelling evidence of this hybridity is their refusal of hybridity as an essentialized category in itself, as they enact their ability to move fluidly between the roles of mammy and mother. Both Twain and Chesnutt "draw innovative parallels between passing over the color line and passing from mammy to mother," but unlike Mrs. Harper's, Roxy's movement between kinship and racial relations is not unidirectional (73). Roxy's movement between the roles of mother and mammy and the way she simultaneously performs and interpolates race through these roles call into question the prioritization of biology for determining both kinship and race.

As a white-looking woman who might be able to "pass" were it not for the racially-marked dialect of her speech, Roxy's very existence calls into question antebellum beliefs about racial dualism and essentialism. Our first glimpse of Roxy easily dispatches with notions of "blackness" as visible. We read that

From Roxy's manner of speech, a stranger would have expected her to be black, but she was not. Only one-sixteenth of her was black, and that sixteenth did not show. She was of majestic form and stature, her attitudes were imposing and statuesque, and her gestures and movements distinguished by a noble and stately grace. Her complexion was very fair, with the rosy glow of vigorous health in the cheeks, her face was full of character and expression, her eyes were brown and liquid, and she had a heavy suit of fine soft hair which was also brown, but the fact was not apparent because her head was bound about with a checkered handkerchief and the hair was concealed under it. Her face was shapely, intelligent, and comely – even beautiful. (9)

¹⁴¹ We read, early on, that Percy Driscoll's slaves "were not related." (See Twain, *Pudd'n'head Wilson*, 11). The narrator's denial of kinship here calls to mind both the denial of kinship ties in the system of plantation slavery in which kinship relations between slaves were thwarted by the geographical relocation of commerce or the threat of death, and which nevertheless produced universal kinship ties. The patriarchal plantation system is also one in which kinship ties between master and slaves was suppressed, reduced to a paternalism by which all slaves were rendered "children," but by which they could not claim any rights of inheritance from the fathers.

Even if Roxy's blackness is not visible, it is audible – or rather, legible in Twain's text. The dialect that marks Roxy's speech sets her apart from other potentially "tragic" mixed-race heroines, most of whom display the "privilege" of "white" ancestry not only in their skin, but in their education. Unlike Roxy, her predecessors (including Eliza, Clotel, and Iola) speak in standard English, a sign that, in the tradition of "moderate" abolitionism, they may be more immediately-suited for racial uplift than their uneducated or illiterate (and visibly "blacker") counterparts. Roxy's speech is a continual reminder to the reader of her enslavement, and later, when she is freed, her social immobility.

Roxy's "one-sixteenth" of blackness, then, is visible not in her person but only in her performance of race. Her "very fair" complexion, the "rosy glow of vigorous health" in her cheeks, and "fine soft hair" do not reveal assumed biological traits of "blackness," nor do her "majestic form and stature," "imposing and statuesque" attitudes, or "noble and stately grace" fit nineteenth-century notions of racialization. On the contrary, her "shapely, intelligent, and comely – even beautiful" face are marks of whiteness that immediately set her apart from the by now well-established "mammy" stereotype of a homely, unsexed matron.¹⁴²

In addition to her appearance, Roxy's performance of race is specifically coded as a relation to both legally white people and her fellow enslaved companions, as "She had an easy, independent carriage – when she was among her own caste – and a high and 'sassy' way, withal; but of course she was meek and humble enough where white people were" (9). Roxy's racial performance is not simply one of black subordination, however. Her visible whiteness makes Roxy subject to the colorist prejudices by which she views herself in closer proximity to white

¹⁴² Besides her marked speech, Roxy's performance is also evident in her clothing – in the checkered handkerchief that hides her "white" hair and the clothes that class her as a slave. It is her clothes through which Roxy later performs gender as well as race. Linda A. Morris discusses this in "Beneath the Veil: Clothing, Race, and Gender in Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson*" *Studies in American Fiction* 27.1 (1999): 37-52.

gentility than the darker-skinned enslaved people on the plantation. The first conversation of hers we read gives both her race and her ideas about colorist hierarchies away, in part because her speech resembles that of other black characters. While her and Jaspers' dialect are similarly marked, Roxy's rejection of Jaspers reveals that she ascribes to colorism, delineating racial hierarchies even among the mutually-enslaved. The fact that Roxy's "got sump'n better to do den 'sociat'n wid niggers as black as [Jaspers] is" is later revealed in her supposed preference for a white mate, and one of high birth at that (8). Barbara Chellis argues that Roxy "accepts the class structure as completely as any other white member of the Dawson's Landing community."¹⁴³ This discussion merits more closely examining the extent to which Roxy, by virtue of her dual role as both mammy and mother, is alternately empowered and disempowered in her struggle against racial hierarchy.

A large part of Roxy's personal history is omitted as Twain fails to explain the conditions of the relationship between Roxy and Colonel Cecil Burleigh Essex, who Roxy claims is Chambers' father. Leslie Fiedler argues that "there seems no doubt that [Twain] thought of the union between Roxy and Essex as a kind of fall," likening this union to that of James Fenimore Cooper's Cora and Uncas.¹⁴⁴ Fiedler disregards the significance of both racial mixture and gender in this equation, however, as Cora's whiteness is compromised in a way that Essex's is not by an interracial union. Here, as shown in the previous chapters, the white woman/nonwhite man relation does not work under the same set of social assumptions as that between a white man and a nonwhite woman. The difference between these power relations, and the particular vulnerability of women who are not legally white makes Roxy's position more clear. As

¹⁴³ Barbara Chellis. "Those Extraordinary Twins: Negroes and Whites." *American Quarterly* 21.1 (Spring 1969): 103.

¹⁴⁴ Fiedler, "As Free as Any Cretur . . ." in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, ed. Sidney E. Berger. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 254.

Michael Rogin argues that “the white woman is missing from *Pudd’nhead Wilson*” in his discussion of miscegenation and violence, we can see this vulnerability as one important way in which Roxy cannot function as a white woman in the text.¹⁴⁵

What Fiedler acknowledges earlier in his discussion is the undeniable hierarchy of power implicit in this relationship between Roxy, an enslaved woman, and Essex, a white, male First Family Virginian “of formidable calibre” (5). Fiedler writes that “if the fathers of the South are Virginia gentlemen, the mothers are the Negro girls, casually or callously taken in the parody of love, which is all that is possible when one partner to a sexual union is not even given the status of a person.”¹⁴⁶ If this is the case, as we realize it may be with Roxy, we ought take the pride with which she proclaims Essex as the father of her child in a different light. However we regard Roxy’s feelings toward Essex, the “parody of love” in Roxy’s claim is most heavily suggested by the fact that her apparent pride in her child’s paternity is far from a legal claim. Significantly, this revelation of paternity to her son does him no material good. Although she is visibly white, Roxy’s status as a slave also renders her child a slave – a person who is both socially and legally “fatherless.”¹⁴⁷ As Hortense Spillers’ evacuation of kinship suggests, the child’s status as property has negated the paternal kinship relation.

Further, while Chellis gives Roxy every amount of agency in her union with Essex, stating that “she had mingled her blood with the F.F.V.,” she also fails to acknowledge that

¹⁴⁵ See Rogin, “Frances Galton and Mark Twain: The Native Autograph in *Pudd’nhead Wilson*.” Susan Gillman and Forrest G. Robinson. *Mark Twain’s Pudd’nhead Wilson: Race, Conflict and Culture*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 78.

¹⁴⁶ Fiedler, “As Free as Any Cretur . . .,” 254.

¹⁴⁷ Barbara Ladd, in her discussion of *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, goes to great pains in an attempt to prove that Tom Driscoll, by virtue of a Missouri law of 1855, would have been deemed “legally white,” having “less than one-fourth African ancestry.” Glaringly missing from her consideration, however, is the fact that Roxy, as a legally black slave, would have been unable to prove the paternity by which her son’s apparent percentage of “African ancestry” or “white ancestry” might be determined. See Ladd, *Nationalism and the Color Line in George W. Cable, Mark Twain, and William Faulkner*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 117-119. What I refer to here by calling Chambers “fatherless” is Hortense Spillers’ notion of “kinlessness,” which I will discuss at length in the next chapter.

Roxy's "blood" has already been "mingled" with whites, most likely under circumstances which imply the exploitation of enslaved, black women. Although the evidence of racial mixture is visible in Roxy's person, her actions throughout the story play also with the relations of kinship that are so closely connected to ideas of race and identity. By switching the assumedly "white" Thomas á Becket Driscoll and the "black" (though as visibly as "white" as both Tom and herself) Valet de Chambre, Roxy usurps family hierarchy and the racial essentialism by which one child is heir to his father's estate and the other (though his father was *also* a "First Family Virginian") can, at the whim of the other child's father, be "sold down the river."

In the act of switching her master's child for her own, Chellis argues that Roxy is "a reversal of a type, the kindly Negro mammy who loves and protects the white child . . . Instead, she enslaves the white child, putting him in a position to be sold down the river, depriving him of his freedom just as surely as the white man has deprived her of hers."¹⁴⁸ Alternately, Myra Jehlen absolves Roxy in a way, regarding the "maternal economy" of the text as dealing with the distribution (but not the production) of whiteness-as-property.¹⁴⁹ Both of these readings misconstrue, to some extent, Roxy's agency within the system of enslavement. Roxy can move around the players within this system, but she does not have the power to make any quantitative change to that game. Moreover, her efforts are ultimately reversed – in true tragic form, concluding with just what our heroine attempted to prevent: it is Roxy's own biological son who is, in fact, "sold down the river" at the story's conclusion. In this reversal, we might view Roxy's actions in light of their potential resistance to the hierarchy that makes the one child her master. In this respect, she certainly does work against the iconic trope of the mammy. Rather than give

¹⁴⁸ Chellis, "Those Extraordinary Twins: Negroes and Whites," *American Quarterly* 21.1 (Spring 1969): 102-103.

¹⁴⁹ See Myra Jehlen, "The Ties that Bind: Race and Sex in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*," *American Literary History* 2.1 (Spring 1990), 47. Carolyn Porter, though, regards this as not a reversal of the mammy figure, but as "Satirizing the southern ideology that exalted the mammy's devotion to her white owner's children as well as theirs to her." See Carolyn Porter, "Roxana's Plot," *Cultural Critique* 15 (Spring 1990): 161.

an ethical evaluation of how Roxy works with the system of plantation slavery, though, I would like to examine how Roxy's unique place within that system – as both a mammy and a mother – allows her to work within it.

As Roxy switches the almost-identical babies and we are spiraled into the racial-fiction Roxy has created, Twain presents notions of socially-constructed race against these assumptions of essentialism. Once she has exchanged the children's places (simply by changing the one's clothes with the other's), we see her practice performing her corresponding mother and mammy roles with relation to them:

She got up light-hearted and happy, and went to the cradles and spent what was left of that night "practicing." She would give her own child a light pat and say, humbly, "Lay still, Marse Tom," then give the real Tom a pat and say with severity, "Lay *still*, Chambers! – does you want me to take sump'n *to* you?"

As she progressed with her practice, she was surprised to see how steadily and surely the awe which had kept her tongue reverent and her manner humble toward her young master was transferring itself to her speech and manner toward the usurper, and how similarly handy she was becoming in transferring her motherly curtness of speech and peremptoriness of manner to the unlucky heir of the ancient house of Driscoll. (17)

One child becomes "white" and the other "black," in effect, because Roxy is able to place them – and herself – into these racialized relations. Regarding the children's physical likeness to one another, and thinking of race as, at least to a certain extent, a social construction, Roxy correctly surmises that becoming either "white" or "black" requires that each child learn the intricacies of performing race both with relation to one another and to their respective mammy/mother.¹⁵⁰ Because the boys are still only infants, Roxy easily teaches them to assume their newly assigned roles.

This act that sparks the main plot of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* distinguishes Roxy from more typical representations of the mammy figure. Regarding Roxy as Twain's reversal or satire of

¹⁵⁰ There is some debate among scholars whether Twain's text presents Tom's bad character as a result of his innate "blackness" or his upbringing. Chellis discusses this debate. See "Those Extraordinary Twins: Negroes and Whites," 101.

the mammy is appropriate if in this we can imagine that Roxy prioritizes the well-being of her own child over that of her master's. In this respect, Roxy rejects the role of the mammy for that of the mother by prioritizing her child over that of her master, though in an admittedly more-complicated façade by which she must also perform the mammy relation to her own biological son.¹⁵¹ Importantly, the agency that Roxy is given here is a result not of her biological motherhood alone, or any privilege of her relative "whiteness," but of her dual station as both mammy and mother. She alone is in a position to switch the babies precisely because she is the only one who can tell the children apart. The exchange of racial identities is therefore enacted only through the children's respective kinship relations to herself, and as she enacts those relations she becomes the pivot of Tom's and Chambers' racial identification.

Importantly, Roxy's initial feelings of kinship toward her own son are what prompt her to enact the switch in the first place. We see Roxy's motherly pride in an early scene in which Pudd'nhead Wilson compliments both children in Roxy's charge. "They're handsome little chaps. One's just as handsome as the other, too," Wilson tells her. She responds, "Bless yo' soul, Misto Wilson, it's pow'ful nice o'you to say dat, caze one of 'em ain't on'y a nigger. Mighty prime little nigger, I allays says, but dat's caze it's mine, o'course" (10). Though Roxy feels motherly love for her biological son, she acknowledges the social hierarchy that would prevent others from such a comparison with the son of a respected white family and attributes her own preference as a result of her biological maternity alone. Moreover, although Roxy is undoubtedly already familiar with the precariousness of slavery at the story's opening, she is particularly alarmed when she comes to fully realize that her child is in as precarious a position

¹⁵¹ Chellis denies that Roxy's motives here are maternal at all, reading her aspirations for her son only as the sublimation of her own desire for (legitimized) whiteness. This ignores Roxy's initial thoughts of infanticide and suicide, however, as whiteness doesn't figure in her plan to accompany her son to heaven. See Chellis, "Those Extraordinary Twins: Negroes and Whites," 108-109.

as herself: “Her child could grow up and be sold down the river! The thought crazed her with horror” (16).

Roxy’s baby-switching recalls both this horror and her earlier, abandoned, plan for saving her son: suicide and infanticide. She initially tells Chambers, “Come along, honey, come along wid Mammy; we gwyne to jump in de river, den de troubles o’ dis worl’ is all over – dey don’t sell po’ niggers down de river over *yonder*” (16). Only the case of Margaret Garner is necessary to illustrate that the option of infanticide is no mere plot device on Twain’s part, but reveals the actual consideration (particularly when the Christian promise of heaven is taken seriously) that enslaved people sometimes viewed death as better than enslavement. To kill herself in order to send (and accompany) her child to heaven is the ultimate sacrifice for Roxy. As James Grove calls Roxy, “a life force countering the sterility and irony surrounding her,” the maternal devotion of this scene may well be in mind.¹⁵² While Chellis chastises Roxy’s actions as akin to that of her masters, Porter acknowledges that “the aggression unleashed . . . by Roxana’s plot is driven out of control by the horror that provokes it.”¹⁵³ Put simply, for Roxy’s situation, the choices are limited. Enslaved mothers were often denied the ability to perform the protective duties of motherhood because of the system that often denied enslaved people both freedom of action and access to kin from whom they were likely to be separated by either sale or death.¹⁵⁴

The figure of the enslaved mother functions in opposition to the privileged and protected place afforded to white feminine motherhood. Switching her own child with that of her master, Roxy collapses the mammy/mother dualism, as she not only moves between, but melds the two

¹⁵² James Grove. “Mark Twain and the Endangered Family.” *American Literature* 57.3 (October 1985), 381.

¹⁵³ Porter, “Roxana’s Plot,” 165.

¹⁵⁴ Porter notes that “mother” can be regarded as a social – not a natural – identity when discussing the status and agency of slave mothers, that “the slave mother is specifically positioned in and by that [slave] economy [of social death] in *Pudd’nhead Wilson*.” Porter also notes the sexual and maternal dualism in black female figures in the simultaneous hypersexualization and desexualization of a “Jezebel/Mammy.” See Porter, “Roxana’s Plot,” 148, 154, 148.

roles in her relation to both Tom and Chambers. She cannot change roles completely, as the reader is always aware of the “truth” of her maternal relations, but her actions in these roles still have enough effect to propel the plot of Twain’s novel. The agency Roxy is afforded by this collapse is short-lived, as she performs the role of mammy in relation to her own son. While feelings of biological kinship drive Roxy to switch the babies, her behavior of both kinship and racial relations keeps the respective children in their places. The boys grow up, and Roxy raises them in accordance with these new relations of race and kinship, with predictable results. Her son becomes the haughty young man who believes he will be the future master of the plantation, and the master’s child becomes a man who anticipates his own lifelong enslavement.

The relationship between Roxy and her biological son is, until the revelation of his true identity, no longer a mother-child relation, but one of mammy and child/master. Twain collapses the relation between mother and mammy in the text, though, as we read further about Roxy’s adoption of the role of mammy to her own child: “He was her darling, her master, and her deity, all in one, and in her worship of him she forgot who she was and what he had been” (21). The narrative almost forgets this, too, as the problem of referring to the two boys presents a problem for the omniscient narrator whose reader is in on the secret, so to speak, but whose characters remain ignorant of Roxy’s switch. At the outset, Roxy’s performance as both mother and mammy in forming the children’s newly-raced roles is also enacted by Twain’s narrator, who acknowledges the problem in naming the children. This problem of naming is initially solved in chapter four, as the narrator declares “This history must henceforth accommodate itself to the change which Roxana has consummated, and call the real heir “Chambers” and the usurping little slave “Thomas à Becket” – shortening this latter name to “Tom,” for daily use, as the people about him did” (18-19). As “this history” correspondingly switches the boys’ names to

reflect their assumed roles rather than their original identities, Twain's narrator is willing to maintain the performance of identity, just as Roxy does and the boys (who do not even realize that they are performing race) do. The switch is so convincing, then, that even the narration must acknowledge it – as, of course, must Roxy. What Roxy sacrifices in this reassignment of identities is any affective attachment she might elicit from her own son. While Roxy's relationship with the young man now known as "Chambers" is seldom shown in Twain's novel, we see her relationship with "Tom" degraded from one of child and mother to that of master and slave.

In some of the story's most disturbing scenes, we see the new-christened "Tom" beat Roxy – the woman who is really his biological mother. Ultimately, he sells her "down the river" just as she is enacting yet another motherly sacrifice by offering herself up to be sold (though she has legally gained her freedom by this point in the story) in order to preserve his white inheritance. What might be most disturbing about these scenes is that they may not elicit the same horror from the reader were it not for our knowledge of Roxy's biological relation to the grown man now known as "Tom." Myra Jehlen presents this as a shift in the text, "where the injustice if racial inequality was first measured by the violation of Roxy's natural motherhood, now inequality will be justified by the spectacle of the emancipated and empowered Tom's unnatural sonhood."¹⁵⁵ This "unnatural sonhood" is reversed, however, as Roxy uses her knowledge of "Tom's" true birth to extract the support that he initially denies her. If Roxy cannot get "Tom's" support by appealing to his affection for his "mammy," she will get it by blackmailing him with the truth that she is his biological mother.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Jehlen, "The Ties that Bind," 50.

¹⁵⁶ Porter cites Roxy's removal of "Driscoll" from "Tom's" name as one iteration of her imitation of the master, made ironic by the fact that the body of the enslaved mother itself negates paternity. See Porter, "Roxana's Plot," 156-157.

Roxy's position as mother might be viewed not simply as another imitation of the master, then, but as an enactment of maternity. As the white matrons are rather quickly dispensed with or pushed to the fringes of Twain's story (we almost forget that Tom Driscoll's Aunt Pratt is still alive, until she sends the telegram informing him of his uncle's death), Roxy is doubly correct in stating that this "Tom" "hadn't no mother but me in de whole worl'" (43). Even in conversation with "Chambers" does Roxy prioritize her relationship with the other boy, invoking her position as Tom's mammy, but without revealing to the man who believes himself to be her son the truth of his birth. It is in this role as mammy, and not with the truth of her biological motherhood, that Roxy presents herself as someone who has a right to know the details of "Tom's" business, asking "Was I his mother tell he was fifteen years old, or wusn't I?" (39). However, when Roxy initially attempts to gain "Tom's" sympathy by virtue of her position as mammy (though not as mother), she fails. It is *only* after he recognizes her position as his own biological mother (simultaneously realizing the power she holds over him in the danger he faces were she to reveal that relation) that "Tom" submits to the role of a dutiful child.

The confusing identities of the two boys, and their relation to Roxy, continues to present a problem for the narration's representation of the text's kinship relations, even after the convenient name changes the narration enacts. While still calling the real Chambers "Tom" even after he knows the fact of his birth, the text now refers to Roxy as "his mother" (45).¹⁵⁷ These two moves, (the naming and the kinship relation in "Tom" and "his mother") should, logically, be mutually exclusive in the text. The fact that they are not suggests the story's acknowledgement of the conflation of the mother and mammy roles that Roxy enacts. The excess of names and roles in the text is too much for the narration itself to support. In this way,

¹⁵⁷ The problem of naming the interchanged children presents some confusion for the text, which the narration, itself, recognizes. I will discuss this problem further, below.

Pudd'nhead Wilson represents the difficulty of dealing with the overabundance of names and identities and Roxy's role as both mother and mammy. As "Tom" continues to call Roxy by the more ambiguous appellation, "mammy," rather than "Ma," we see how Roxy's biological motherhood, even when recognized, is never completely free from her role of mammy. Likewise, her role as the dutifully mammy to "Tom" is complicated by her knowledge that this child is not the progeny of her masters' family, but her own biological son.

The synchronous existence of "Tom" and "his mother" in the text is, on one level, an assertion of Roxy's underlying motherhood. As she is about to voluntarily allow herself be sold again into slavery for "Tom's" benefit, she asserts that her motherhood is just as valid as a white woman's. She asks him, "Ain't you my chile? Em does you know anything dad a mother won't do for her chile? Dey ain't nothin' a white mother won't do for her chile. Who made 'em so? De Lord done it. En who made de niggers? De Lord made 'em. In de inside, mothers is all de same. De good Lord made 'em so" (86). Complicating this act of universal motherhood ("In de inside, mothers is all de same") is the fact that, as Mark Patterson recognizes, "A 'white' mother . . . could not sell herself into slavery."¹⁵⁸ Roxy's particular sacrifice, then, is reserved for the figure of the African American mother. More than justifying the inclusion of black mothers in a realm of universal motherhood, her particular expression of maternity does not transcend Roxy's legal blackness, but depends upon it.

Patterson explains Roxy's role as mammy – as "surrogate" or "adoptive" mother to "Tom" in a system that does not allow for "the equality of maternity."¹⁵⁹ The text, however, does not seem so sure of this division between Roxy's maternal roles. The narration's switch in naming is itself confusing, emphasizing the precarious nature of these identifications, and calling

¹⁵⁸ Mark R. Patterson. "Surrogacy and Slavery: The Problematics of Consent in Baby M, *Romance of the Republic* and *Pudd'nhead Wilson*." *American Literary History* 8.3 (Autumn 1996), 463.

¹⁵⁹ Patterson. "Surrogacy and Slavery," 464.

to the reader's attention Roxy's role in enacting these shifts through her own acknowledgement of kinship with the two children. From the complex and prominent relationship between "Tom" and Roxy, a reader might expect an equally complex parallel in Roxy's relation to "Chambers," the child who is really the child of her master, but is in the position of her own son. The rather conspicuous disappearance and reappearance of "Chambers" is one of the text's many oddities. By switching the babies, Roxy attempts to privilege her own son, while condemning her master's heir to slavery, but whatever mother-child relationship that the new "Chambers" might have gained as a result of this switch seems to have been lost. As Roxy disinherits the original Tom Driscoll, she does so twice – by ultimately disinheriting the child who believes her to be his mother from that kinship relation, as well. An extension of this discussion might take into account the presence (and absence) of "Chambers" in this story, in his partially-articulated kinship relations to both Roxy and "Tom," as well as his final position as a "white" man who was raised as a slave, which becomes Twain's revision of the familiar "tragic mulatto" trope, rendered more complex because Roxy, herself, does not fit neatly into this role.

The story's close turns to the science of individualism rather than that of race to restore the identities of Valet de Chambres and Thomas Driscoll. In Pudd'nhead Wilson's courtroom evidence of the children's fingerprints, the question of racial identity becomes one of name and of individual identity, but importantly *not* one of race or kinship. Neither man is proven to be "white" or "black" by this evidence, nor is Roxy's maternity clearly identified. Rather, the altered fingerprint records, alone, indicate that a change has been made, and Roxy is identified not maternally but circumstantially – as the only person in a position to have made the switch. This science of fingerprinting stands in as a science of individual identity against popular theories of scientific racism by which "negroes" and other races are "proven" inferior to whites

throughout the mid-to-late nineteenth century.¹⁶⁰ The scientific courtroom-drama ending of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is essential; the detective story plot is no more separable from the racial melodrama of the story than are Twain's (conjoined?) twins.¹⁶¹ And David "Pudd'nhead" Wilson is, after all, the titular character.¹⁶² Perhaps what makes the tale so tragic is how close Pudd'nhead (who must understand the implications of the justice he enacts) brings it to remaining a farce.¹⁶³ Twain's ambiguous ending leaves "Tom," Roxy's biological child, "sold down the river" as punishment for his crimes, and restores "Chambers" to his original position as white, slaveholding master. "Tom's" story proves equally tragic to that of "Chambers's" inability to fit into either white or black society, as it falls short of condemning the system of Southern plantation slavery.

¹⁶⁰ That Twain's story takes up science in a text invested in questions of racial difference is unsurprising, him against the science by which racism is explained and justified in the mid- to late-nineteenth century though this engagement with a science of individualism rather than one of racial classification sets. Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* comes most obviously to mind as another text in clear engagement with the science of racialization and racism.

¹⁶¹ Susan Gilman suggests that "Siamese twins" and "mulattoes" are presented as equally "freakish [and] monstrous" in the post-war context of Twain's novel and Eric Sundquist notes the parallel in these entities "that are meant to be separated but have become freakishly, uncannily merged. See Susan Gilman, "'Sure Identifiers': Race, Science, and the Law in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*." Susan Gillman and Forrest G. Robinson. *Mark Twain's Pudd'nhead Wilson: Race, Conflict and Culture*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 88 and Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations*, 259. This pairing of conjoined twins and the racial mixture of the mulatto both suggest the discourse of kinship at work in Twain's text. Gilman also argues that the themes of twinning and mistaken identity in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* and *Those Extraordinary Twins* "must be understood against the context of turn-of-the-century racism: legal discourse on issues of blood, race and sex, miscegenation; Jim Crow laws and Negrophobic mob violence; the ideologies of imperial and racial Darwinism." Susan Gilman. *Dark Twins: Imposture and Identity in Mark Twain's America*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 9.

¹⁶² Barbara Ladd notes the centrality of Wilson for contemporary readers of Twain, and the story's end as implicating Northern whites in the perpetuation of slavery and its post-war effects. See Ladd *Nationalism and the Color Line in George W. Cable, Mark Twain, and William Faulkner*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 110-111.

¹⁶³ Forrest Robinson, discussing the "happily distracting conclusion" of the "bad faith narrative" of Pudd'nhead Wilson's court trial, cites Wilson and the deceptively-happy ending he produces as distracting everyone (including the reader) from the wrongs of slavery. See Forrest G. Robinson, "The Sense of Disorder in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*." Susan Gillman and Forrest G. Robinson. *Mark Twain's Pudd'nhead Wilson: Race, Conflict and Culture*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 28 and 44.

By centralizing Pudd'nhead Wilson as the person Twain's tale is ostensibly "about," Roxy and her role are shifted to the background of some (if not most) discussions of the novel.¹⁶⁴ James Cox notes the dual role of Roxy and "Pudd'nhead" Wilson in identifying "Tom," as he emerges "almost as if they were his parents," and also notes a somewhat fraternal relationship between Pudd'nhead and "Tom," through their filial relation to Judge Driscoll.¹⁶⁵ This reading assumes the necessity of a father, which Roxy's child, of course, does not have. As Roxy is the person the text most clearly identifies as either child's parent, we might rather imagine a fraternal relationship between Tom and Chambers, triangulated through their relationship to her, or as nineteenth-century topsy-turvy dolls.¹⁶⁶

Literary discussions of the twins, Angelo and Luigi, in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* generally have taken the author's explanation of the "literary Caesarean operation" by which he has extracted the one tale from the other for granted (125). But what this backdrop of twins and twinning leaves in the text is a clear counter-relationship for Roxy's nearly-twin boys. If we take seriously the claim that *Those Extraordinary Twins* is a metanarrative for *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, another version of national romance, the tale of racialized "twinning" does not result in anything resembling fraternity.¹⁶⁷ Although Wallace-Sanders notes that "*they share a birthday and a mother, which, in effect, makes them twins*," this narrative of the interracial national family

¹⁶⁴ In one version of this, Howe, discusses the reader's potential points of identification in the story, wondering whether he can identify with the detective or the criminal. Howe doesn't suspect that his reader might identify with Roxy. See Howe, "Race, Genealogy and Genre in Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson*," 502.

¹⁶⁵ Cox, "Pudd'nhead Wilson Revisited." Susan Gillman and Forrest G. Robinson. *Mark Twain's Pudd'nhead Wilson: Race, Conflict and Culture*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 13 and 16.

¹⁶⁶ See Wallace-Sanders, *Mammy*, 75. In her role as mother, Roxy might also be figured as the character who gives life to the story, sharing the role of author with Twain. Jehlen argues that Roxy's "sovereignty over the children extends naturally to the story of which she is a sort of author." See Jehlen, "The Ties that Bind," 43. Similarly, Ladd notes Twain's "paternal distance" from the text and its raced characters, painting him as a "symbolic mulatto," and Eric Sundquist calls Twain "(black) mother as well as (white) father to his illegitimate mulatto heir," of a text. See Ladd, *Nationalism and the Color Line*, 137 and Eric J. Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature*. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1993), 257. These constructions present Roxy as an appropriate parallel for Twain, and this is an appropriate text in which to match Twain with one of his characters, as its composition is caught up with concepts of twins and twinning.

¹⁶⁷ See Ladd's *Nationalism and the Color Line*, 106.

(unlike that in Alcott's "The Brothers") can only be constructed triangularly – through Roxy, the mother/mammy (75). Unlike positive literary renditions of African American motherhood, by Twain's contemporaries Charles Chesnutt and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, and perhaps reinforcing the stereotypical role of the mammy, Roxy does not have the means to create a truly loving kinship relation with her son, who seems to have been tainted by the system of plantation slavery that is painted as equally harmful to the characters of both masters and slaves.

The story's odd "restoration" of "Tom" to his "rightful" position as slave and the relegation of "Chambers" to the unhappy liminality reserved for racial ambiguity leaves no family for Roxy to preside over (much less a "polyglot" family of narratives of race and reunion). In *Pudd'nhead Wilson's* tragic conclusion, essential (and legal) categories of race and kinship trump not only Roxy's visible "whiteness," but her enactment of maternity, as well, as Twain leaves her biological son – and hence her own motherhood – without a clear place in the conclusion of the novel. The twinning of Tom and Chambers in much discussion of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* stems, in part, from this inability to place Roxy's biological son. His presence at the story's close seems excessive, as he returns to the plot that had almost completely discarded him when Roxy made the change that relegated her future master to slavery.

Roxy's relation to this surrogate son also seems excessive, in the sense that it has been overdetermined. Although we are to understand that the dutiful son, acknowledging his adopted relation to his Roxy despite the revelation of his biologically-construed whiteness, provided for her financially in her old age, we are left unsure about the nature of their relationship. In part, Roxy is an inconvenient relation, the tie that relegated him to an upbringing of enslavement, but which cannot be cut nevertheless. Most emphatically, we never view Roxy as a mammy to this grown man, though this relation most accurately describes the legality of their relation. Nor can

we fully understand Roxy as this man's mother, in a text that insists upon the prioritization of biological relations at its conclusion and which has chosen not to depict the details of their relationship. Were it not for Roxy's enslavement (on which the plot of the novel is, of course, dependent), we might be better able to parse these relationships. In the case of Roxy as mammy/mother, we see how the enslavement of African American people becomes an excessive factor in determining their kinship relations. My next chapter will focus on this excess content of enslaved kinship.

Chapter Five

Kinfullness

In John Anderson Collins' 1855 poem, "The Slave-Mother," a self-emancipated woman, upon being recaptured, refuses to acknowledge her infant in order to secure its freedom. If recognized to be hers, according to the distinctly-American law of genealogical – matriarchal – racialization, *Partus sequitur ventrem*; the child would follow the condition of the mother.¹⁶⁸ This denial of kinship is presented as an act of profound maternal affection, then, since denying the mother-child relation renders the child free. In the poem we read that

They bound her fast, but no reply
The torturing whip or hand-cuff wring;
With one long, sad, despairing cry,
Her babe upon the ground she flung,
And, as her heart were turned to stone,
With madness flashing from her eye,
Refused the helpless one to own,
Or listen to its moaning cry.

Fast driven on with curse and blow,
No mercy hoping in her wo,
One thought alone can give her rest,
And soothe a mother's aching breast;
Better, her nature to deny,
Than that loved child in slavery die.

According to the poem, it is the unnatural despair created by slavery that causes the enslaved mother to best serve her child by denying her own maternal nature.

The situation reveals the peculiar condition of the enslaved mother, whose relation to her children determines their status as slaves. When asked if the child is her own, she states, "I have no child! this stranger one/Belongs to freedom—not to me," re-working legalized notions of

¹⁶⁸ The end of the poem makes a connection between enslaved black women in the United States and Virginia, whose father killed her himself rather than see her enslaved. The relation between Verginia and Virginia here is a radical one, as the allusion explains, even if it does not justify, infanticide for the most desperate enslaved mothers. In this way, the poem alludes to the Roman origin of *Partus sequitur ventrem*, which was a departure from English patriarchal law when adopted in the Virginia colony in 1662.

enslavement and belonging. The mother's exceptional devotion to her child is ultimately repaid when a judge deems both the child and herself free, because the slave-catcher cannot prove ownership. The mother's sacrificial refusal of kinship is not lost on the judge, however, as he proclaims, "This childless mother?—Let her go!" (11). The irony of the phrase "childless mother" acknowledges the legal kinlessness of enslavement – the mother who cannot acknowledge a child because the child does not "belong" to her – as well as the voluntary state of "childlessness" that this woman assumes in the attempt to free her child.¹⁶⁹

However, the experience of the enslaved mother cannot be fully explained by the state of "kinlessness" that Hortense Spillers uses to describe the state of enslaved African American families. When notions of "belonging" are manifest in the triumph of property over kinship, the poem's "slave-mother" and child might be better characterized as an excess of kinship – *kinfullness*, rather than kinlessness. While Spillers uses kinlessness to articulate the denial of enslaved people from recognizing or participating fully in kinship relations, as kinlessness denotes a lessening or an evacuation of kin, *kinfullness* attends to the additional content of racialized kinship relations. In the case of this poem, *kinfullness* does not indicate that the mother's kinship is excessive, (just as kinlessness does not indicate an actual lack of biological kinfolk) but that her kinship has been filled with the excess content of inherited enslavement. Because the enslaved mother's ironic position as a "childless mother" does not erase but reinscribes that kinship relation, her act of refusing to acknowledge that relation which would enslave her child is ultimately rewarded in the poem: both she and child are freed at the poem's close, and are therefore able to experience the "natural" relation between mother and child, unencumbered by the excess juridical content of inherited enslavement.

¹⁶⁹ I refer here to Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17.2 Culture and Countermemory: the "American" Connection (Summer, 1987): 74-75. See also Saidiya Hartman, *Loose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2007).

The mother's logic lies in her realization that her own kinship relation is the lynchpin that connects enslaved black bodies with the biological reproduction of slavery. Recognizing this does not merely render her kinship a burden – the enslaved woman is not merely disempowered here – but realizes her ability to free her child by refusing to recognize the maternal (i.e., legal) relation. Kinfullness stands as an alternative to kinlessness, addressing how the texts discussed deal with the relations of enslaved motherhood – a representation of racialized maternity that is abundant with various, sometimes conflicting, notions of kinship.

The excess content of kinfullness shows that the enslaved woman cannot be a “childless mother” other than under the peculiar legal auspices of slavery. As in this poem, the most iconic figure of the enslaved black woman is also represented as a “childless mother” – a mammy, charged with the task of mothering the white, free children of the slaveholder, but with no legal parental claim to her own. The enslaved mother's denial of maternity to her own child in the poem does not negate maternal affection, but refuses the legal reproduction of enslavement that has the potential to render the mother-child relation as a matter of material increase rather than a familial bond.¹⁷⁰ In Collins' poem, black motherhood is perfected in the selfless relation to the black child – an admittedly problematic relation in which maternity is best enacted when it is denied. Despite its problems, this abolitionist text works against the idealized image of the black mammy who is not characterized by her relation to her own children, but rather, by her relation to white children.

“Kinfullness” speaks to the concerns (or anxieties) that come to bear upon kinship choices: what kinship relations might be produced by sexual couplings, or created in domestic

¹⁷⁰ Nancy Bentley notes this excessive, non-familial, content of the condition of kinlessness: “Kinlessness is a sign of social death but also a sign of social death but also a source of interminable life, an unbounded “future increase” detached from any enforceable claims or obligations that belong to heirs.” See “The Fourth Dimension: Kinlessness and African American Narrative,” *Critical Inquiry* 35 (Winter 2009): 271.

spaces of family, and which kinship relations are recognized or denied in genealogies that also racialize. This chapter therefore focuses on texts in which characters' racial identifications affect how they construe kinship relations, and vice versa, extending previous chapters' conversations about interracial sexual kinship to re-theorize the relationship between race and family. First, I will examine more closely assumptions behind the concept of "interracial" desire, which, as has been shown in previous chapters, serves not only to racially-mark white women participants, but which is – in these heteronormative constructions – always implicated in the futurity of reproducing racially-mixed people. Readings of Louisa May Alcott's "M.L." (1863) and Kate Chopin's "Desiree's Baby" (1893) treat the role of "interracial" sexual desire and desirability as contributing to a narrative of interracial heterosexuality, in which the concept of desire extends beyond its individual agents to notions of racially-reproductive futurity which have implications for a racialized national family.

At stake in stories like these is the preservation of white womanhood, itself – both biologically and rhetorically conceived – in the threat of interracial sex creating racially-mixed children. From this discussion of interracial desire, I turn to Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* (1892) and its presentation of the mother as the central kinship relation by which racial identity is determined and embraced. While representing racially-mixed characters who choose to identify with black, enslaved, mothers rather than white, free, fathers, the text still – problematically – prioritizes biological kinship relations. Last, I will discuss the emergent "New Maternal Negro" of Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901), which appeals to universal motherhood while still struggling with the familial and national drama of interracial kinship.

Matters of Taste?: “White” Women and the Futurity of Interracial Desire

During the 1858 political campaign season, Democrats in Indiana played-up concerns that Republicans were “amalgamationists” in a demonstration involving young white women in white dresses carrying banners that read “Fathers, save us from nigger husbands!”¹⁷¹ Apart from the assumption that white women are universally desirable and therefore the potential objects of sexual desire for black men, this rhetoric also assumes that white women are *not* subjects capable of desiring black men, and therefore must be “saved” from interracial sexual encounters that were categorized definitively as rapes. This understanding of white women designates whiteness, as Elise Lemire explains, as “an identity people can only claim if they have certain sexual race preferences.”¹⁷² A matter of sexual preference or “taste,” then, also works to racialize these subjects. Both the “blackening” of Desdemona and the re-figuring of Mary King as a mixed-race heroine work against this notion of racialization, positioning the “white” women in these stories somehow “beyond the pale” of whiteness, as a result of their interracial sexual desire. More simply put, this desire is set apart because it does not seek to preserve racial segregation, separation, or “purity.”

¹⁷¹ Julius Augustus Lemcke describes this in *Reminiscences of an Indianian*. (Indianapolis: The Hollenbeck Press, 1905), 196. Several contemporary writers on Civil-War era politics also mention this demonstration as significant. See James A. Rawley. *Race and Politics: “Bleeding Kansas” and the Coming of the Civil War*. (Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1969), 167; James M. McPherson. *Battle Cry of Freedom: the Civil War Era*. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), 159; Eric Foner *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*. (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1988, 32; and Stephen H. Hartnett. *Democratic Dissent and the Cultural Fictions of Antebellum America*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002, 69.

¹⁷² Elise Lemire. *Miscegenation*, 4. While Lemire uses the phrase “sexual race preference” here, I choose the word “desire” rather than “preference” to characterize these sexual-racial orientations. The word “preference” denotes a prioritization, indicating that sexual desire is directed preferentially at persons of one specific race, rather than another. While it may be true that some people or characters do sexually “prefer” mates of a particular race (whether for political, fetishistic, practical, racist, or other reasons), this is not always the case. My own reference to “sexual desire” is meant to leave open various possibilities for the sexual impulses of the figures I discuss. Whether these impulses constitute hierarchical sexual racial “preferences” (as was assumed about figures such as Desdemona and Mary King) is a matter tangential to my discussion here. The possibility that their sexual desire is directed at non-white men in these narratives is the possibility with which I am most concerned here.

The beginning of this chapter deals with the questions that arise when we examine white women's sexual desire as racialized. What constitutes "interracial" desire? What assumptions does a notion of racialized desire maintain? What are its implications for desiring subjects? And further, what are the implications of "interracial" desire for racial categories, themselves? This concept of racially-located sexual desire I want to discuss is loaded. For the majority of nineteenth-century texts, interracial sexual desire is always a heterosexual desire, oriented toward biological reproductive futurity. It is therefore implicated in reproducing race (and reproducing the American nation), and the anxieties that surround "interracial" desire are not only about racial integration, but racial mixture in "amalgamated" bodies. This overdetermined positioning of desire must be taken into account when examining white racist discourses against "amalgamation" and the limits of "pro-amalgamation" literatures if we are to fully understand the potential (or maybe the necessary) consequences of this desire: the reproduction of race.

Nineteenth-century discussions of interracial sexual relations evidence contradictory assumptions about white feminine "nature" in their imaginings of white women's capacity for interracial desire. In their most visible form, these discussions attempt to deny the existence of voluntary sexual kinship relations, occluding the possibility of white feminine desire for the racial Other. Differences in these assumptions about white feminine desire lie at the heart of claims for Desdemona's "bewitchment" by Othello and Mary King's "corruption" by abolitionists. In her *Appeal in Favor of Americans Called Africans*, Lydia Maria Child questions white racist assumptions about a general "repugnance between the two races, founded in the laws of nature," citing the existence of "interracial" desire as proof that such desire *not* "unnatural," but dependent upon individual inclinations (200). Characterizing interracial desire instead as a "matter of taste," Child individualizes the notion of desire in a way that this racist rhetoric

cannot. While the most profound anxieties about amalgamation lie in larger implications for the racially-construed nation, narratives of interracial romance such as William Allen and Mary King's often focus on individual concerns and rights, displacing the more expansive logic of racist amalgamation anxieties.

In this way, the narrow scope of "interracial" desire in such narratives indicates the limitations of these individualistic accounts for challenging the larger implications that lie at the foundation of racist discourse. However, addressing interracial desire only as a matter of taste serves as an insufficient response to the racist logic that attends to larger implications for the future of the white race and the nation. The particular place of interracial desire in amalgamationist literatures is essential for the more radical potential for antiracism and an antiracist futurity that speaks to the place of amalgamation in the American nation. Examining when such desire is permissible and when it is denied indicates the limits and potential of these stories to work against racist models of national futurity. The seemingly-slight differences between William Allen's narrative and Louisa May Alcott's loosely-related story, "M.L." illustrate this point, in their different locations of and allowances for "interracial" desire. While Sarah Elbert presents the connections between these two stories and argues that Alcott's is based on her knowledge of Allen and King's case, a fundamental difference exists between the two narratives. This lies in the fact that Alcott stops short of fully acknowledging the possibility of a white woman's fully-informed interracial desire. This difference is central to understanding Alcott's story and its limitations.¹⁷³

¹⁷³ Sarah Elbert argues that Alcott's "M.L." must have been based on the popular Allen-King controversy, which Alcott must have (and did, most probably) learned about through her uncle, the Reverend Samuel May, who was in correspondence with Allen. See her discussion in the introduction to *The American Prejudice Against Color* and in "An Inter-Racial Love Story in Fact and Fiction: William and Mary King Allen's Marriage and Louisa May Alcott's Tale, 'M.L.'" *History Workshop Journal* 53 (2002): 17-42.

In “M.L.”, the rich and beautiful, but kinless Claudia falls in love with the musical, noble Paul Frere. The couple is happily engaged, when the jealous Jessie Snowden discovers part of a letter Paul had written but could not bring himself to send to Claudia, revealing his history as the son of a wealthy Spanish planter and an enslaved “quadroon” woman. After his father’s death, Paul was separated from his half-sister Nathalie and sold with the estate, to suffer in slavery until he escaped and appealed to his now-wealthy, married sister, who purchased him and gave him the financial assistance necessary to start a new life as a free man. Although she is surprised at Paul’s revelation, Claudia remains determined in her devotion to him, and the couple is married – against the advice of Claudia’s many friends. The story closes with a narrative of a happy couple, with Paul gaining both kin and country through his marriage to Claudia, and Claudia’s former life of frivolity now replaced with new Christian meaning and substance in antiracism. The “interracial” couple is triumphant at the story’s close, and Claudia’s commitment to Paul recasts her familiar model of white Christian feminine virtue in beliefs that support interracial marriage. Alcott’s revision of the virtuous white woman is not dependent on her preservation of racial “purity,” but in her ability to incorporate the non-white Paul into her own structure of family, which serves as a microcosm of racially-integrated national and Christian community.

Although the ultimate antiracist message of Alcott’s story is quite clear, Claudia’s early love for Paul is predicated on her initial ignorance of his racial difference, which distinguishes her ultimate desire to continue her relationship with him from Mary King’s initial entry into an interracial relationship with Allen, having full knowledge of the probable opposition they would face. Sarah Elbert argues that “Claudia’s romantic love for Paul becomes ‘true love,’ in nineteenth-century feminist parlance, precisely as her racial identity (whiteness) is challenged,” that is, her own whiteness – socially constructed – is deconstructed through this allowing for

“interracial” sexual desire.¹⁷⁴ However, as Elbert also recognizes, “her wealth, beauty, and ‘whiteness,’ . . . ensure that she is a voluntary outcast, and therefore her privilege remains intact.”¹⁷⁵

Claudia differs from Mary King in her position as “voluntary outcast” by virtue of the choice that Alcott forgoes for her heroine – that which allows the “white” woman’s desire to be directed toward a man who is already known to be “black.” Interracial sexual desire is diverted in Alcott’s story, as the desire that preexists knowledge of racial difference fails to refigure white womanhood at its origins. Because her connection to Paul is already established, it need only be continued – a somewhat easier matter for the narrative in that it does not need to account for Claudia’s desire for a “black” man. Claudia’s desire is both explained and mitigated by the fact of Paul’s visual whiteness. Instead of initiating a kinship relation that is known to be “interracial,” Alcott’s story only asks that Claudia perpetuate a pre-existing promise of love and marriage. She does not offer Paul her love in the text, but simply refuses to take back that declaration on the basis of her new knowledge of his race. In some respects, the story begins in a position unable to prohibit interracial desire. It has already occurred; no “natural” forces repel Claudia from Paul, and the desire that has already been expressed cannot be undone.

If we take this initial desire as a potential relation of kinship – a relation of potentiality that cannot be broken once desire has been articulated – Claudia and Paul’s story resembles even more closely the narrative of interracial sibling kinship, between Paul and Nathalie. Paul and Claudia’s relationship is, at its outset, structured similarly to his relationship to his half-sister, Nathalie. Unable or unwilling to deny her connection to Paul, Nathalie goes so far as to take responsibility for her brother when he arrives on her balcony asking for her help. She asks him,

¹⁷⁴ Sarah Elbert. *Louisa May Alcott on Race, Sex, and Slavery*. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997), xl.

¹⁷⁵ Elbert, *Louisa May Alcott on Race*, xl.

“‘Who should help you if not I?’” (142).¹⁷⁶ In this, Nathalie serves as a model of true womanhood, which precedes Claudia’s and structures Paul’s relationships with all (white) women. His “reverence for womanhood” (126) stems from this fraternal encounter that causes him to look on all (white) women as a brother would. He tells Claudia, “Since then, in every little maid, I see the child who loved me when a boy, in every blooming girl, the Nathalie who saved me when a man, in every woman, high or low, the semblance of my truest friend, and do them honor in my sister’s name” (142-143). One might ask whether Nathalie’s relationship to Paul renders her “less white” or, at least, more proximate to blackness via this relation. Although Nathalie and Paul’s kinship is mediated by a white relative (their father), Paul’s reverence for Nathalie lies in the fact that she could have denied her own kinship with him, but has instead chosen to acknowledge it.

However, recognizing a mixed-race brother may be less scandalous than accepting a mixed-race lover. It is significant that this sibling relationship mediates the romantic one between Paul and Claudia, as Paul requires from Claudia not a lover’s passion, but a sister’s pity as he pleas “give your abhorrence to the man who dared to love you, but bestow a little pity on the desolate boy you never knew” (141). Claudia’s elevation depends upon the story’s comparison of the two women: as Nathalie was Paul’s “angel of deliverance,” (142) Claudia becomes his “strong sweet angel” (144). The recognition of Paul as kin seems accessible to these women, in part, because figuring them as “angels” dismisses any sense of racial contamination resulting from this kinship. In this configuration of “angelic” compassion, their kinship is rendered abstract; it is a kinship more humanistic than biological, more along the lines of figuring a national, rather than a nuclear, family.

¹⁷⁶ Alcott, “M.L.,” in Elbert, *American Prejudice*, 142. Further citations of “M.L.” are taken from this edition and will appear parenthetically in the text.

Paul's position as universal Brother (read also in his name, Paul Frere,) permeates the text as the couple's "interracial" marriage stands in for other forms of interracial national family. Through his marriage, we find that "Paul was no longer friendless and without a home, for here he found a country, and a welcome to that brotherhood which makes the whole world kin" (152). Here we do not only read Paul as Claudia's individual lover, but as universal brother to the white American nation – a nation that must acknowledge its own history of interracial kinship. Paul's relation to his white sister (and assumedly his white wife) as "her proud protector" and "her willing servitor," indicates that he does not pose the usual "threat" of overly-sexualized black masculinity (140). In his marriage to the kinless Claudia, Paul is positioned to take the place of the father and brother she never knew. That Paul's own father crossed racial boundaries in his own sexual relations is not insignificant: Paul embodies this boundary-crossing, and his own sexuality is not bounded by notions of racial containment.

Still, the more potentially radical reading of Alcott's story lies not in the interracial romance plot, but in this reading and its suggestion of American (inter)racial (re)union. What is most salient here is what remains unsaid, and what the characterization of Claudia-as-angel might allow readers to forget: the fact that interracial marriage (like other marriage in the nineteenth century) is likely to produce mixed-race people. Presented as a narrative of interracial brotherhood, the amalgamation narrative is replaced by a somewhat "safer" one of integration.¹⁷⁷

In Kate Chopin's "Désirée's Baby" this embodiment of racial difference functions differently – as a racial misrecognition: as Désirée's child comes to be perceived as visibly

¹⁷⁷ Elise Lemire rightly argues that interracial "brotherly" kinship is also closely related to the notion and acceptance of sexual kinship, writing that "the only way that Paul, or any other 'black' person for that matter, can claim the political and social status of 'brother' . . . would be through his full acceptance by 'whites' as a lover and a husband as well." While I agree, I am interested here in the prioritization or prominence of an ironically de-sexualized kinship in Alcott's story. As Lemire herself notes, "Alcott . . . avoids depicting racial blackness as attractive." See Lemire *Miscegenation*, 9, and her further discussion of "M.L.," 133-136, in which she contrasts Alcott's de-sexualized depiction of interracial romance with the more "pornographic" depictions of anti-amalgamationists such as Edward Williams Clay and Jerome Holgate.

black, the assumption her husband, Armand, makes is not that she has been unfaithful, but that Désirée, being of unknown parentage, must be racially mixed, herself.¹⁷⁸ Neither of these is necessarily the case, of course. Ironically, at the story's end, we learn that Armand is the one with known black ancestry, though hidden from him by his Creole father and mixed-race mother. Still, the racial figuring of Désirée – a figuring dependent upon the emerging “blackness” of her baby – has already taken effect.

Though Désirée turns out not necessarily to be a mixed-race heroine by the end of Chopin's story, she still functions as one.¹⁷⁹ In truth, neither the characters nor the reader know whether Désirée is racially-mixed or not. The story leaves her race ambiguous, though her motherhood of a racially “black” child leads her husband to figure her own race accordingly. That Armand figures incorrectly is almost beside the point with regard to Désirée and her baby's place in the narrative. We might as well assume that they both remain “black,” permanently cast out of the husband/father's house because of this supposed racial difference, as Armand is unlikely to reveal the truth he has discovered about his own family's racial history.

That both woman and child *can* be racially re-figured – even as Armand's race is refigured for the reader – is illustrative of the slippery business of racialization, particularly for women who have the potential to be racially “marked” by the racialization of their children. The result is an effective reversal of racial transfer from Désirée's baby to Désirée, rather than the other way around. This shows how the production of “amalgamated” children has implications

¹⁷⁸ This immediate accusation of sexual unfaithfulness occurs in Pauline Hopkins' short story, “Talma Gordon,” in which Captain Gordon says “I hurried away to your mother and accused her of infidelity to her marriage vows” without first considering the possibility that a woman he'd believed to be white had racially-mixed ancestry. See Pauline Hopkins, “Talma Gordon” Originally published in *Colored American Magazine* 1 (October 1900: 271-290. Reprinted in *The American 1890s*, ed. Susan Harris Smith and Melanie Dawson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 115.

¹⁷⁹ As Anna Shannon Elfenbein holds, “Désirée's Baby” is, in Chopin's oeuvre, “the story most clearly patterned on the tragic octoroon formula.” See *Women on the Color Line: Evolving Stereotypes and the Writings of George Washington Cable, Grace King, Kate Chopin*. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989), 118.

even for racially-defined parents, especially the mothers who are held responsible for (re)producing race. We've see these implications in Mary Jemison's concern for her children, rather than herself, given the prospect of discrimination if she were to return to white society. Désirée's baby indicates the futuristic concerns of amalgamation, as the racial recognition of his parents is dependent upon his own interracial embodiment. Not even the "diluting" of race in visibly-white couplings can prevent the possibility of (inter)racial return in the visible mixture of the child. The child's implications for Désirée and its challenges to Armand's "white" Creole identity also point to a national future of racial mixture and ambiguity.

Ultimately, the "matters of taste" in Alcott's and Chopin's stories of "amalgamation" extend beyond the individual participants in these "interracial" relationships, toward a larger narrative of national racial mixture and national racial anxieties. Like the "begriming" of Desdemona in minstrel depictions of *Othello* and the refigured racialization of Mary King alongside the mixed-race heroines of abolitionist fiction, the projection of interracial kinship relations toward a national futurity in these narratives extends the white women characters beyond normative rhetorics of white womanhood. Just as Blackface Desdemona refigures the white heroine in the minstrel genre and Mary King is refigured as mixed-race heroine, Claudia Frere, Faith Dane, and Désirée Aubigny emerge in genres not of individual romance, but of national racial reunion. Because the "interracial" kinship relations of these women are oriented toward a future of racial intermixture rather than the preservation of whiteness, their narratives more closely resemble that of the mixed-race heroine than of the white woman who must be protected from the prospect of interracial sex.

Racial Identification and *Iola Leroy*'s "Condition of the Mother"

The effects of racial malleability as determined by kinship relations can be seen in Frances Harper's anti-passing narrative, *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted*.¹⁸⁰ In the early chronology of *Iola Leroy*'s title character, we read a familiar story, in the well-established tradition of "tragic mulatta" narratives: The young Iola, raised as the white, privileged daughter of a Southern planter and his wife, and educated in the North, has no knowledge of the "black blood" apparently flowing through her veins; and she holds no real means for identifying herself with the "black" race of people who she knows only as servants. She can hardly anticipate the chain of events that are, however, unsurprising to Harper's readers: her father will die unexpectedly, her mother's manumission will be found faulty and their marriage determined illegitimate, their children will be listed among the "property" of the estate, and the sad fate of Iola and her brother Harry is to be sold by the unsympathetic relatives of their father.

Before these revelations, Iola is able to see the "value" of her own apparent whiteness, as she tells her already-anxious mother "that she would hate to be colored" while discussing the persecution of a fellow-student who was found to be "passing" for white.¹⁸¹ While she is not entirely unsympathetic to the condition of African Americans in her antebellum setting, it is not until the revelation of her own inherited "race" that transforms this sympathy into greater feelings of identification and kinship with black people. Ultimately, Iola's search for her mother

¹⁸⁰ P. Gabrielle Foreman notes, importantly, that "we should differentiate passing narratives and white mulatta genealogies from *anti-passing* narratives" in "Who's Your Mama? 'White' Mulatta Genealogies, Early Photography, and Anti-Passing Narratives of Slavery and Freedom," *American Literary History* (2002): 507. While I agree that *Iola Leroy* is, indeed, an anti-passing narrative, I do not wish to imply that this categorization encompasses all of the novel's complexities. I find it not as useful to definitively-categorize this text as it is to identify the genres of fiction to which Harper's novel is either opposed or with which it is in conversation, such as the abolitionist literatures of the antebellum period and the plantation nostalgia fiction of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

¹⁸¹ Frances Harper, *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 91. Further references to *Iola Leroy* are from this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text.

– who she now knows to have been enslaved and passing for white – results in both Iola and Harry choosing to identify with their mother’s race – as black people.

Even as *Iola Leroy* re-writes the trope of the “tragic mulatta” as the central figure of an anti-passing narrative, it falls into the familiar trap of racial essentialism.¹⁸² “Passing” by definition, assumes a fixed starting point of racial identification. Characters who are “really” black (due to various imagined quantities of “black blood”) struggle with the possibility of “passing” for – but never *being* – white. Harper frames *Iola Leroy*’s anti-passing narrative in terms of racial recognition, which emerges as function of her characters’ recognition of their African American kinship ties. What Harper illustrates here is a different form of kinfullness than “The Slave Mother”: It presents not as the legal excess of racialized kinship, but as a literal excess of kinfolk. The mixed-race heroine’s condition of kinfullness manifests itself in overabundance of kinship relations, as the conflicting “white” and “black” family members suggest potentially-conflicting racial affiliations. Put another way, kinship relations that are initially conceived along the lines of what Nancy Bentley calls “bare genealogy” are reconfigured along lines that couple biological relatedness and shared racial identification, via a racialized, (and here necessarily maternal) kinship.¹⁸³ That is, mixed race characters, even if they

¹⁸² Geoffrey Sanborn argues that for at least one character in Harper’s story (Dr. Latimer, Iola’s eventual husband), “blackness is biological without being essential, . . . [as Latimer is] the only character whose blackness is entirely contingent upon the degree to which he loves his mother.” And “For Latimer, ‘being black’ depends on ‘feeling black’ and ‘feeling black’ depends in turn on the force of his love for his mother.” See “Mother’s Milk, Frances Harper and the Circulation of Blood,” *ELH* 72 (2005): 709. I disagree that this is a mark against Latimer’s racial essentialism, as the move by which he identifies racially with his mother – a move made by other mixed-race characters in the novel – is founded upon the same assumptions that any amount of “black blood” would render one “black” and that performing racial whiteness would be an act of assumedly-deceptive “passing.” Here, Harper’s text falls short of what Leslie Lewis argues about Pauline Hopkins’s “colored consciousness” of “biracial identity.” Lewis writes that “Pauline Hopkins’s fiction suggests that early twentieth-century black women defined African American identity based on an understanding of the past that always acknowledges a racially mixed heritage.” See Leslie W. Lewis “Toward a New “Colored” Consciousness: Biracial Identity in Pauline Hopkins’s Fiction” in *Women’s Experience of Modernity, 1875-1945*, ed. Ann L. Ardis and Leslie W. Lewis. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 35.

¹⁸³ Bentley, “The Fourth Dimension: Kinlessness and African American Narrative,” 271.

might “pass” for white, choose to identify with their enslaved mothers, rather than slaveholding fathers.

In what must have appeared to Harper’s post-Reconstruction readers as a familiar defense of slavery, the visibly-white and still unknowing Iola Leroy’s initial anti-abolitionism is based on the picture of her own slaveholding father as a “kind” master. Now removed to the North for her education, in true plantation nostalgia form Iola recalls her youth and the close relations between the families of white masters and enslaved people on the plantation where she was raised.¹⁸⁴ Iola claims, “I love my mammy as much as I do my own mother, and I believe she loves us just as if we were her own children” (97). Once Iola Leroy has learned the truth of her biological mother’s (and hence, her own) legal blackness, though, this claim is exposed as dubious; much of the rest of Iola’s story focuses on her persistent search for and reunion with her biological mother and is accompanied by her corresponding forgetting of “Mam Liza,” whom Iola never seeks out, and the fond memory of whom almost disappears from her story.¹⁸⁵

Biological ties are necessary, then, even if not sufficient for determining kinship relations. Like Iola, enslaved or formerly-enslaved characters in the novel come to ignore certain biological kinship ties – i.e., those between masters and slaves – and to articulate kinship, instead, along lines of shared racial identification rather than biological genealogy, alone. Throughout *Iola Leroy*, race is determined by which kinship relations are acknowledged and which are rejected or forgotten, and the figure of the (black) mother lies at the center of both recognizing kinship and articulating race for Harper’s characters. That her hope of reconciliation

¹⁸⁴ For further discussion of the workings of patriarchy in the system of American plantation slavery, see Russ Castronovo’s *Fathering the Nation: American Genealogies of Slavery and Freedom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

¹⁸⁵ While Harper emphasizes the relevance of biological kinship in *Iola Leroy*, Alice Rutkowski discusses the trope of interracial adoption in Harper’s poetry in “Leaving the Good Mother: Frances E.W. Harper, Lydia Maria Child, and the Literary Politics of Reconstruction,” *Legacy* 25.1 (2008): 83-104.

with her mother has “colored” Iola Leroy’s life is a telling metaphor for the rest of the story, in which this relationship binds biological, maternal kinship and an admittedly-biological conception of race (118). In this way, the novel illustrates the “social efficacy” that Spillers tells us is denied in slavery.¹⁸⁶

To emphasize the persistent importance of biological kinship to the text, we need only recognize that it is decidedly *not* her relationship with “Mam Liza” which has colored Iola’s life, as she (along with Harper’s other characters), prioritizes biological kinship relations – and, specifically, kinship with her *mother* – as formative of her racial identity. Given Iola’s previous declaration of affection for her “black” mammy, the choice to seek out one woman and not the other seems at least somewhat arbitrary. However, the only other time readers are reminded of Mam Liza is when Aunt Linda’s “motherly” manner “seemed to recall the bright, sunshiny days when [Iola] used to nestle in Mam Liza’s arms, in her own happy home” (169). Importantly, the dialect-speaking, illiterate Aunt Linda does not remind Iola of her biological mother. Geoffrey Sanborn remarks, “She chooses to be black and to perform race work in large part because of certain particular affections that are beyond rational explanation,” but this “rational explanation” might simply be the prioritization of biological, maternal genealogy.¹⁸⁷ This leaves Iola’s later reminiscence as rather curious amidst the novel’s prioritization of (immediate) biological kinship ties (grandmother, mother, uncle, and brother) rather than the “support system” of non-biologically-related but similarly-raced and enslaved people, as only immediate biological kin constitute Iola’s familial obligations. Harper’s emphasis on motherhood highlights the mother-child relationship as primary to the novel’s aspirations for racial determinacy and uplift.

¹⁸⁶ Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 75.

¹⁸⁷ Sanborn, “Mother’s Milk,” 708.

This focus on the child-mother relation in *Iola Leroy* is emphatic, and can be evidenced in both Iola's search for her mother following the Civil War and in her maternal Uncle Robert's similar search for his mother, Iola's grandmother. In truth, Harper's own motherhood is foregrounded in her dedication of the novel to her own daughter, Mary E. Harper. In its nostalgic look at antebellum plantation life, to a generation born before the advent of the Civil War, the novel's opening chapters recall the violence that chattel slavery has done to the enslaved family. After the war, we find members of these rendered families in a religious camp meeting. "In that meeting were remnants of broken families—mothers who had been separated from their children before the war, husbands who had not met their wives for years" (179).

The most poignant depiction of these separations is that between an enslaved mother and child. Alongside the various tales of grown children longing for their lost mothers, the scene of initial parting is presented by an older, dark-skinned emancipated woman named Harriet, who we learn is Robert's mother and Iola and Harry's maternal grandmother. Harriet gives witness to this event in what is both one of the most familiar and one of the most heart-wrenching scenes of Harper's novel:

Bredren an' sisters, it war a drefful time when I war tored away from my pore little chillen . . . When my little girl . . . took hole ob my dress an' begged me to let her go wid me, an' I couldn't do it, it mos' broke my heart. I had a little boy, an' wen my mistus sole me she kep' him . . . Many's the time I hab stole out at night an' seen dat chile an' sleep'd wid him in my arms tell mos' day. Bimeby de people I libed wid got hard up fer money, an' dey sole me one way an' my pore little gal de oder; an' I neber layed eyes on my pore chillen sence den. . . . But I'se prayin' fer one thing, an I beliebs I'll git it; an' dat is dat I may see my chillen 'fore I die. (180)

With similar emphasis on the mother-child relation, Robert's one stated grudge against his otherwise "good" Mistress is the fact that she has sold his mother away from him. He tells another enslaved man, "Uncle" Daniel, "I ain't got nothing 'gainst my ole Miss, except she sold my mother from me. And a boy ain't nothin' without his mother. I forgive her, but I never forget

her, and never expect to. But if she were the best woman on earth I would rather have my freedom than belong to her” (17-18). Robert’s “except” here is indeed a great one. It is in this “except” that we see biological kinship ties usurping the fiction of the plantation family that places white masters and mistresses in the position of patriarchs and matriarchs to supposedly-devoted black slaves, who figure in pro-slavery discourse and white plantation nostalgia fiction as perpetual children.

Robert’s reunion with his mother is equally emotional to Harriet’s story of their parting. Even as she is still speaking, “He found his mind riveting to the scenes of his childhood . . . Unbidden tears filled his eyes and great sobs shook his frame. He trembled in every limb. Could it be possible that after years of patient searching . . . he accidentally stumbled upon his mother – the mother who, long years ago, had pillowed his head upon her bosom and heft her parting kiss upon his lips?” (181). Although Robert “had been reared by his mistress as a favorite slave” and this mistress, Mrs. Nancy Johnson, “had fondled him as a pet animal, and even taught him to read” – *and* even though Harper’s narrator assures her reader that “notwithstanding their relations as mistress and slave, they had strong personal likings for each other” – neither a slave mistress’ alleged kindness nor a “strong personal liking” compares with mother-love here or anywhere else in the novel (7).

In a system in which the patriarchy (and sometimes matriarchy) of white masters prevents enslaved fathers and mothers from maintaining kinship ties and duties, the “black” mother is often framed as a rival to the white plantation mistress – particularly when the two women’s children are fathered by the same man. In the vein of plantation fiction which Harper might be most vehemently opposing (by authors such as Thomas Dixon and Thomas Nelson Page), enslaved – and especially, mixed-race – women appear as heartless seducers of white men

and dangerous usurpers of white womanhood. Authors writing against these depictions of mixed-race women work to reveal the sexually-vulnerable position of enslaved women, whose legal position makes them or their female ancestors more likely to have been victims of rape than seducers, and emphasize a shared feminine virtue akin to that more prominently associated with white womanhood. This equation of respectability is particularly visible in the transfer of Robert's mistress' name to his mother in the text: the narration eventually comes to call Robert's mother "Mrs. Johnson," changing its references to his mistress, who shares this legal name, to "Miss Nancy."

While the shift of the appellation "Mrs. Johnson" from Robert's slave-mistress to his biological mother indicates his ability, after emancipation, to assign his duty where his true affections lie, the story of Robert's relationship with his mistress pairs his preference for biological kinship relations with the imagined kinship of plantation slavery. We see this in his encounter with Miss Nancy after the war and his reunion with his mother:

She hardly knew how to address him. To her colored people were either boys and girls or "aunties and uncles." She had never in her life addressed a colored person as "Mr. or Mrs." To do so now was to violate the social customs of the place. It would be like learning a new language in her old age. Robert immediately set her at ease by addressing her under the old familiar name of "Miss Nancy." This immediately relieved her of all embarrassment. She invited him into the sitting room and gave him a warm welcome. (151)

Miss Nancy's refusal to address Robert with the formal title of "Mr." here is countered by the fact that prior to this scene (and only once in the chapters following it), Robert's enslaver is the one called "Mrs. Johnson." The narration, itself, articulates the shift of this title from the mistress to the mother: "'What,' said Mrs. Johnson, as we shall call Robert's mother, 'hab become ob Miss Nancy's husband? Is he still a libin'?"' (188). The formerly-enslaved characters continue to call the former slave-mistress "Miss Nancy," but now the "Mrs. Johnson" that the narrative

has previously used to refer to the white woman is applied to her black counterpart, the woman who has competed with her for Robert's affections and won. This "Mrs." serves to establish an air of respectability for Robert's mother, as the reassigning of the title "Mrs. Johnson" from his mistress (who never serves as a sufficient mother to Robert), to his mother represents Robert's own ability to perform the duties of a son now that he is free to forsake the guise of a supposedly-devoted enslaved "boy."¹⁸⁸

The reassignment of names, like Robert's abandoning his mistress to search for his mother, couples the articulation of kinship ties between formerly-enslaved people and the assertion of black womanhood as both respectable and respected, on par with (if not superior to) white womanhood in the novel. As the narrative makes clear which Mrs. Johnson is Robert's real mother, as if to avoid confusion, it strikes the other Mrs. Johnson from the text: To leave two Mrs. Johnsons in the novel would be excessive. It would be equally excessive to suppose that the faux-kinship of plantation slavery allows the white Mrs. Johnson to serve as a mother-figure to a man she had enslaved.

Following the war, Miss Nancy's economic position is such that she requires charity. Somewhat surprisingly, we read that "kind and generous, [Robert] often remembers Mrs. Johnson and sends her timely aid" in the novel's last pages, knowing that here, this name again refers to his old mistress rather than his mother (280). This new position as the recipient of charity (including Robert's almost over-charitable forgiveness of his former mistress) leaves this instance of "Mrs." lacking its former power. With Robert reunited with his biological family, this

¹⁸⁸ A similar move occurs in Jourdan Anderson's witty "Letter from a Freedman to his Old Master" as he writes to his former enslaver, to Colonel P.H. Anderson, regarding his own wife, "The folks call *her* Mrs. Anderson" (emphasis mine). See Anderson's letter, as told to Valentine Winters, "Letter from a Freedman to his Old Master" *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, August 12, 1865. Reprinted in Lydia Maria Child's *The Freedman's Book*. (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1865).

Christian charity towards the woman who once forcibly separated him from his mother and sister serves only to confirm him as morally superior.

Before the war, another enslaved man, “Uncle” Ben Tunnel, claims a similar devotion to his mother, which causes him to remain with her rather than escape with his fellow enslaved brethren. Although he tells Robert that he “love[s] freedom more than a child loves its mother’s milk,” his comrades’ desertion to the Union army leaves him “hushing his heart’s deep aspirations for freedom in a passionate devotion to his timid and affectionate mother” (31).¹⁸⁹ We see that the condition of slavery, rather than biological relatedness, determines these characters’ recognition of kinship, as Ben revels that he believes his slaveholder to be his biological father. Recognizing no kinship ties with the man who does not acknowledge him as his son (and who has no legal obligation to do so), Ben’s mother becomes the determining kinship relation in his life, as much as she is the determining racializing relation. Enslaved, he follows the condition of his mother, and thereby inherits his “black” self-identification from her, rather than from his “white” father.¹⁹⁰ This slave-holding father, like the “white” Mrs. Johnson, is an excessive kinship relation, to be discarded in favor of the shared racial identification of the maternal relation here.

¹⁸⁹ This prioritization of family over freedom is not unique to Harper’s novel. Another example of this sentiment can be seen in Charles Chesnutt’s plantation anti-nostalgia tale, “The Passing of Grandison” originally published in *The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line*, (Boston, Houghton, Mifflin, 1899) reprinted in *The Northern Stories of Charles W. Chesnutt*, Ed. Charles Duncan (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2004), 1-21.

¹⁹⁰ The refusal of white, slaveholding fathers to acknowledge their children who were borne by enslaved mothers is not, of course, uncommon. Here I am interested here in the refusal of the enslaved person to identify with this white father, instead choosing a matrilineal African American kinship. This choice also makes for an emphatic rejection of the white father in Richard Hildreth’s 1836 novel, *The Slave: or Memoirs of Archy Moore*. (Boston: John H. Eastburn; republished with an extended second-half in 1852, as *The White Slave; or, Memoirs of a Fugitive*. Boston: Tappan and Whittemore). In *The Slave*, both Archy and his would-be wife, Cassy are the children of their master, Colonel Moore, but have different (enslaved) mothers. Archy not only rejects kinship with his master and (legitimate, white) brother in this narrative, but refuses to acknowledge his relation to Cassy through the Colonel, rejecting the notion that their siblinghood ought prevent their marriage. He notes that the Colonel’s wife “discovered in it no impediment to my marriage with Cassy. Nor did I;—for how could that same regard for the *decencies of life*—such is the soft phrase which justifies the most unnatural cruelty—that refused to acknowledge our paternity, or to recognize any relationship between us, pretend at the same time, and on the sole ground of relationship, to forbid our union?” (48-49).

Even for Harry Leroy, whose relation with his white father did not resemble that between master and slave, the subsequent enslavement of his mother and sister (as well as the threat of his own enslavement) takes precedence when he receives the news of his father's death. Likewise, Iola's racial identification now comes to be determined by her mother's genetic ties after her legal/racial status is revealed. The biological kinship ties that are established and re-articulated throughout the narrative also function as racial ties. Significant because such ties were often broken through the system of plantation slavery by which people were sold regardless of biological family relations by preventing the performance or maintenance of kinship roles, the language of slavery is revisited in this system of biological kinship. "Mammy" is used as a designation of racialized maternity, referring not only to the "black" nurse tending the "white" children of her master, but as a title of affection used by both Ben Tunnel and another man, Salters, to refer to their biological, African-American mothers. This affectionate interchanging of "mother" and "mammy" contrasts sharply with the image of Iola's forgotten Mammy Liza, who remains distinct from Iola's biological mother.

The novel offers itself as a counter to this displacement of Mammy Liza, however when we read remnants of another familiar designation of enslaved faux-kinship on Iola's lips: "Uncle Robert," is not a designation of imagined kinship under plantation patriarchy, but of a biological relation as well as an emotional tie bound by their shared memory of and love for Marie, Iola's mother and Robert's sister (205). The "uncle" figure (common to antebellum and plantation nostalgia fiction in popular texts like Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom* and Joel Chandler Harris' *Uncle Remus*) is here positioned alongside the story's introduction of a biological uncle. The "uncles" who surround Robert at the story's opening (i.e., "Uncle" Daniel and Uncle Ben Tunnel) are re-figured as Robert is revealed to be Iola's maternal uncle – connoting a biological

relation, rather than a common character of plantation slavery. In this way, Robert becomes kin to Iola, linking her to her lost mother and connecting her to her maternal grandmother, who she had never met. The ever-faithful Uncle Daniel, however, embodies a familiar stock figure in his devotion to his young white master. Daniel expresses a complicity with these imagined kinship roles, (despite the inherent violence of the power relations that seem to deny the possibility of genuine love between master and slave), as he claims “I used to nuss Marse Robert jes’ de same as ef I were his own fadder” and argues that he “beliebs [Marse Robert] lob’d me better dan any ob his kin” (21, 25). Though other enslaved people are understandably suspicious of what love he believes “Marse Robert” to show, Daniel’s love is presented as genuine here, and for this honest devotion, he is rewarded. The modern reader cannot help but find herself at least a bit disconcerted by Daniel’s early articulations of enslaved devotion. However, he serves as an important referent for Harper’s emphasis on the biological kinship that has the potential to bind families together in shared goals of racial uplift.

The novel’s prioritization of biological family structures becomes clear as the biological relation Iola had never met before takes precedence over the more familiar mammy of her youth. Shared racial affiliation proves necessary, though not sufficient, for Harper’s characters’ understandings of kinship and belonging. The biological African American family, the heart of which is the mother, constitutes the center of Harper’s racial uplift novel. Both siblings’ refusal to “pass” for white or to marry white people stems from the desire to remain faithful to their African American kin. Iola refuses the white, though upstanding and sincere Dr. Gresham’s proposals of marriage, citing the color line as the “insurmountable barrier” that divides them, even as he argues, “Your complexion is as fair as mine. What is to hinder you from sharing my Northern home, from having my mother be your mother?” (112, 116). While it is clear that Iola

cannot regard any other mother as able to fill the void hers has left, and she has experience living in the North as a white woman, she also cites the possibility of her own motherhood as reason enough for her racial alliance. She asks, “‘Doctor,’ . . . and a faint flush rose to her cheek, ‘suppose we should marry, and little children in after years should nestle in our arms, and one of them show unmistakable signs of color, would you be satisfied?’” (117). Although Iola, her brother, and their mother were all white enough to successfully “pass” as such, the possibility of bearing children who cannot do so binds Iola to her race through these bonds of black maternal kinship.

Further, just as this recognition of visibly-black children would bind her, so does the recognition of her elder kin, as Iola loses a position of employment when her race is revealed through these black kinship ties. Her employer observes that “there was an old woman whom Iola called ‘Grandma,’ and she was unmistakably colored. The story was sufficient. If that were true, Iola must be colored, and she should be treated accordingly” (206). While Iola’s would-be, also mixed race husband, Dr. Latimir, “was a man of too much sterling worth to be willing to forsake his [“black”] mother’s race for the richest advantages his [“white”] grandmother could bestow,” Iola comes to realize that the “blackness” of her own grandmother will construe her own “blackness” by the laws of racialized kinship (240).

The kinship bonds that drive Iola Leroy’s racial identification also position the figure of the mother as essential to racial uplift. While slavery often stifled the ability of enslaved mothers to perform this kinship role to their own children (who were often forcibly separated from them, or because the demands of enslavement disallowed enslaved mothers the ability to tend their biological children) emancipation presents a challenge for mothers and would-be mothers to meet the demands of an American motherhood that, in the national imagination, is figured as

both white and middleclass. Miss Delaney, Harry's fiancée, notes the importance of "colored" mothers to the perception of the race, as a whole. We read that "One day she saw in the newspapers that colored women were becoming unfit to be servants for white people. She then thought that if they are not fit to be servants for white people, they are unfit to be mothers to their own children, and she conceived of the idea of opening a school to train future wives and mothers" (199).

Vashti Lewis interprets Harper's confrontation of such derogatory images of black women that were popular in the 1890s as marked by "schizophrenic overtones" here, observing that "Although this critique on black women may have delighted white readers, certainly women of African descent only a generation removed from slavery must have found insulting the implication that diminished capacity of black women to nurture white children was a necessary impetus for someone to teach them (or for them to learn) parental skills."¹⁹¹ It is also curious that Harper leaves unclear what skills, exactly, formerly-enslaved mothers need to learn.

Once both Robert and Iola's and Henry's and Marie's mothers have been reunited with their children, Iola goes on to express the importance of motherhood in her work toward racial uplift. The Reverend Eustace agrees, upon hearing Iola's paper on the "Education of Mothers" at a parlor meeting, remarking that "the great need of the race is enlightened mothers" who (with the help of "enlightened fathers," who with them must no longer exist as "a legally unmarried race,") can help to raise a generation of children who will be fit for full participation in the American nation (253-54).

¹⁹¹ Vashti Lewis, "The Near-White Female in Frances Ellen Harper's *Iola Leroy*" *Phylon* 45.4 (1984): 321. Further, the 1965 Moynihan Report indicates, this view of African-American motherhood as "pathology" is long-lived. See Daniel P. Moynihan "The Moynihan Report" [*the Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor, 1965] *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy: A Transaction Social Science and Public Policy Report*. Ed. Lee Rainwater and William L. Yancey. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967, 47-94. Spillers' discussion of this "pathology" questions these assumptions about differences between the "white" and "Negro" family See "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 65-69.

Devoted Mothers and Devalued Kin in Charles Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition*

While Roxy's ability to alternate between the figures of the mother and the mammy in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is dependent upon her mixed race, we might read *Iola Leroy*'s racialized articulation of African American kinship via what Stephen Knadler describes as a figure "whose virtue and character illustrate ... new biracial consciousness."¹⁹² The figure of the "New Maternal Negro" is a representation of racialized maternity that refuses to identify as either a version of the stereotypical mammy or as a simple imitation of white motherhood. Even more emphatic than *Iola Leroy*'s choice of African American kinship and identification, perhaps, is Charles Chesnutt's version of this figure: Janet Miller in *the Marrow of Tradition*, a character who is placed in diametrical opposition to the figure of the black mammy. Woven together with Chesnutt's retelling of the Wilmington riot and his depiction of Tom Delamere's blackface performance is what William Andrews refers to as "a kind of spectrum of southern racial opinion and class identity."¹⁹³ In this spectrum, one finds Chesnutt's more progressive African-American characters alongside "familiar stereotypes of the southern romance," which include one Mammy Jane Letlow.¹⁹⁴ Chesnutt's version of the familiar trope critiques what is presented as a necessarily-derogatory representation of this figure. At its heart is the black woman's genuine love for the white children she has nursed. In our very first glimpses of her, she proclaims to her white employer, Olivia Carteret, "Will I come an' nuss you' baby? Why, honey, I nussed you, an' nussed yo' mammy thoo her las' sickness, an' laid her out w'en she died. I would n' let

¹⁹² Stephen K. Knadler, "Untragic Mulatto: Charles Chesnutt and the Discourse of Whiteness" *American Literary History* 8.3 (Autumn 1996), 438.

¹⁹³ Andrews, *The Literary Career of Charles W. Chesnutt*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 202.

¹⁹⁴ Andrews, *The Literary Career of Charles W. Chesnutt*, 205.

nobody els nuss yo' baby; an' mo'over, I'm gwine ter come an' nuss you too."¹⁹⁵ Chesnutt couples this image of the devoted black nurse with her admiration for Olivia's child, who has "sech fine hair fer his age" and "sech blue eyes," along with his physical strength and well-fed appearance (69).

Mammy Jane is not only a mother figure to the white child; she emerges from a long history of enslaved black mammyhood and, now in the Reconstruction Era, attempts to train younger black domestic servants toward contentedness with their positions. As Mammy Jane tells Major and Mrs. Carteret, "I 's fetch' my gran'son' Jerry up ter be 'umble, an' keep in 'is place. An' I tells dese other niggers date f dey'd do de same, an' not crowd de w'ite folks, dey'd get ernuff ter eat, an' live out deir days in peace an' comfo't" (71). Mammy Jane's nostalgia for the "Old South" of plantation slavery is explicit in the text, as she tells Mrs. Carteret "None er dese yer young folks ain' got de trainin' my ole mist'ess give me. Dese yer newfangle' schools don' l'rn 'em nothin' ter compare wid it. I 'm jes' gwine ter give dat gal a piece er my min', befo' I go, so she 'll ten' ter dis chile right" (69). Though no longer a slave, the love and devotion to the three generations of children she has nursed in Olivia Carteret's family are seemingly enough to keep her in this role of contented servitude.

Chesnutt posits "good niggers" like Mammy Jane and her grandson Jerry in sharp contrast to his (mostly mixed-race) characters who are presented as clear models of black social uplift.¹⁹⁶ The younger nurse assigned to the Carteret family (who never was a slave herself and appears to be too young to remember slavery) has no emotive ties to white plantation families

¹⁹⁵ Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition* [1901] Ed. Nancy Bentley and Sandra Gunning. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002), 45. Further reference to this novel are from this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text.

¹⁹⁶ In contrast to Mammy Jane and Jerry as well as middle-class blacks such as the Millers are the blacks involved in the race riot at the novel's climax. Matthew Wilson discusses "Silly Milly," Josh Green's mother, who suffers from the terror of having witnessed the murder of her husband. Wilson notes that Chesnutt writes this black woman's "personal experience of white terror" in the context of anxieties about protecting white women from the threat of rape by black men. See Matthew Wilson, *Whiteness in the Novels of Charles Chesnutt*, 115.

and does not understand the near-kinship affections Mammy Jane holds for the Carterets. “These old-time negroes, she said to herself, made her sick with their slaving over the white folks, who, she supposed, favored them and made much of them because they had once belonged to them,— much the same reason why they fondled their cats and dogs” (70). Denying the possibility of white former slave holders bearing any real love for the people they enslave, the young nurse’s work is clearly not a labor of love, as Chesnutt’s narration explains: “For her own part, they gave her nothing but her wages, and small wages at that, and showed them nothing more than equivalent service. It was purely a matter of business; she sold her time for their money. There was no question of love between them” (70).

It is Janet Miller, however, who provides the clearest contrast with Mammy Jane. Early on, we learn of Janet, the wife of the “black” Doctor Miller, from Mammy Jane (who, of course, “knows all ‘bout de fam’ly”) (45). She tells Doctor Price “Dis yer Janet, w’at ‘s Mis’ ‘Livy’s half-sister, is ez much lik her ez ef dey wuz twins. Folks sometimes takes ‘em fer ne er-nudder,—I s’pose it tickles Janet mos’ ter death, but it do make Mis’ ‘Livy rippin’” (49). Unlike Roxy’s “twin” boys, however, these sisters have no living parent through which to triangulate their relationship; their father, now dead, never publicly acknowledged Janet as his daughter while he lived. Mammy Jane is wrong in her assumption that Janet can take joy in her family resemblance to the half-sister who refuses to acknowledge their relation. We read that “Janet had a tender heart, and could have loved this white sister, her sole living relative of whom she knew. All her life long she had yearned for a kind word, a nod, a smile, the least thing that imagination might have twisted into recognition of the tie between them. But it had never come” (85). When Olivia is still childless, her longing for the “fine-lookin’ little yaller boy, w’at favors de fam’ly

so” – the child of her half-sister – does not drive her to acknowledge her own biological relation to the child who she covets but does not love (49).

As the story unfolds, it is confirmed that both Janet and Olivia’s father was Samuel Merkel. Following the death of Olivia’s mother, Janet was born to Merkel and Julia Brown, his maid, who had formerly been enslaved by his wife’s family. Olivia, after her mother’s death, had been raised by her aunt Polly, with whom her father had had a long-heated dispute about his insistence on keeping Julia in the house. Much of the Carteret family’s plot surrounds the mystery of this affair’s details. Olivia, who believes herself to have been her father’s only legitimate child and has inherited his entire estate, discovers that her father had left a will (which had previously been hidden by Olivia’s aunt, Polly Ochiltree), leaving some land and money to Julia Brown and her daughter Janet, but the majority of his estate to “my dear daughter Olivia Merkell, the child of my beloved first wife” (203). In this, Olivia discovers that her father *had* married Julia Brown (though their marriage would have been rendered illegal due to the anti-miscegenation laws of that state) and acknowledges his paternity of the child in an undelivered letter to his first daughter before his death.

The complexities of this particular family drama plot are significant because they help illustrate the intersection of anxieties about interracial mixture in kinship and the possibility of cross-racial inheritance of property. At the heart of anti-miscegenation law is not simply the belief that racial sexual mixing was “unnatural,” but that white supremacist ideologies were also highly-invested in preserving “white” property and inheritance.¹⁹⁷ Characterizing the racial melodrama of Olivia Carteret and Janet Miller as “Chesnutt’s use of the family as a metaphor for the crisis in American racial politics,” Eric Sundquist connects the drama of “Negro domination”

¹⁹⁷ Peggy Pascoe, for example, argues this point in *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

with that of “Negro” kinship.¹⁹⁸ Racial integration and the “threat” of racial equality are “family crises” for Chesnutt’s characters: We learn that Polly Ochletree has stolen Merrell’s papers in order to disinherit Julia’s child, so that Olivia would inherit her father’s entire estate. Further, when Aunt Polly dies, she plans to leave her house and land to Olivia’s child rather than her other nephew, Tom Delamere, specifically because she believes that the Carteret child “would never sell them to a negro” (123).

If white supremacy is dependent upon keeping wealth in “white” families, the erasure of the color line in interracial marriages and the production of mixed-race children disrupts this system, where the system by which white men are not legally obligated to acknowledge their children born of “black” mothers ensures that their property will not pass to their racially-mixed kin. What Chesnutt’s story also presents in this family drama, though, is the possibility of a non-violent interracial love affair.¹⁹⁹ This possibility deemphasizes the imagined threat of black male sexual violence toward white women in light of the racial-sexual competition between Julia Brown and Polly Ochletree. While Polly contrives to paint Julia as a Jezebel figure (twice she calls her a “hussy”), she reveals her own heartlessness as she relates the episode in which she casts Julia and the child Janet out of Merrell’s house (124, 128). Horrifyingly, Polly admits, “I could have killed her, Olivia! She had been my father’s slave; if it had been before the war, I would have had her whipped to death” (129). The image Chesnutt gives us of their confrontation

¹⁹⁸ Sundquist. *To Wake the Nations*, 397.

¹⁹⁹ Sundquist. *To Wake the Nations*, 411. In this acknowledgement of the reality of violence against black women, Sundquist terms Olivia’s anxiety about her relation to Janet “hysteria,” “the female counterpart to the male hysteria of racial violence that governs the novel’s political plot.” The source of both kinds of racial hysteria is the same: the “threat” of “miscegenation” that fuels the preponderance of lynchings in the early-twentieth century, which (despite the small percentage of causal ties to actual rape claims) are inextricably intertwined with the imagined threat of black male sexuality imposed upon white women. As Sundquist argues, Chesnutt merges politics and genealogy in *The Marrow of Tradition* through the theme of rape that binds these two plots. See Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations*, 407, 409. Also in this vein, Samina Najmi argues that “Chesnutt parallels lynching hysteria with its counterpart: the sexual exploitation of black women” in Janet and Olivia’s family drama.” See Najmi, “Janet, Polly, and Olivia, Constructs of Blackness and White Femininity in Charles Chesnutt’s *The Marrow of Tradition*.” *Southern Literary Journal* 32.1 (Fall 1999): 9.

illustrates the cruelty of the white matron, contrasted with the quiet, passive grief of the black mother. Later, when the town is in an uproar over Polly Ochlitree's apparent murder by a black man (though the reader knows that she has been killed by her own nephew, Tom Delamere, in blackface), Chesnutt persists in highlighting the real danger of white violence toward African Americans. This culminates in the death of Janet and Doctor Miller's son, killed by a stray bullet during the race riot in which white men attempt to enact "revenge" on the town's black citizens for Polly Ochlitree's death (which was actually caused by her white nephew, Tom Delamere).

While Janet has, until the novel's end, been painted as a parallel mother figure to her sister, Olivia, here their paths diverge. Just after Janet's son's death, (and while the riot has dispersed all the town's white doctors), Olivia's boy is in need of medical aid, and the Carteret family seeks the help of Doctor Miller. Because he initially declines to leave his grieving wife's side, Olivia arrives to entreat him to decide otherwise. Though Doctor Miller is mired with grief and anger at the white violence that has killed his own son, when Olivia throws herself at his feet, he is moved by her resemblance to his own wife. "He had been deeply moved,—but he had been more deeply injured. This was his wife's sister,—ah, yes! but a sister who had scorned and slighted and ignored the existence of his wife for all her life . . . This woman could have no claim upon him because of this unacknowledged relationship. Yet she *was* his wife's sister, his child's kinswoman. She was a fellow creature, too, and in distress" (85). Doctor Miller leaves the decision up to his wife, and Olivia plays on both her motherly and sisterly sympathies to persuade her. "'You will not let my baby die!'" she tells her, "'You are my sister;—the child is your own near kin!'" (245). This appeal is not entirely unfounded: while in the child's earlier illness, Janet shows sympathy for her sister as we read that "She was greatly interested; she

herself was a mother, with an only child. Moreover, there was a stronger impulse than mere humanity to draw her to the stricken mother” (85).

It seems, then, to be the biological tie to her sister and the child – and not simply the bonds of universal motherhood – that drives Janet’s sympathy. Later, though, she admits to a hierarchy in these kinship relations, telling Olivia “‘My child was nearer . . . He was my son, and I have seen him die. I have been your sister for twenty-five years, and you have only now, for the first time, called me so!’” (245). Although she rejects her sister’s all-too-convenient acknowledgement, Janet ultimately instructs her also grief-ridden husband to go to the Carteret’s aid by an act of what seems like motherly sympathy. Stephen Knadler regards this act as “‘threaten[ing] to shatter no mere sacred image of whiteness (or blackness for that matter) but to disrupt its *form*,” by which he describes the novel’s “deconstruction of whiteness as rhetorical performance.”²⁰⁰ In Janet’s case, this form is the assumed exclusively white claim on motherhood.

Janet’s embodiment of universal motherhood in this scene is what Najmi calls Chesnutt’s “cautious hope for racial awareness on the part of white women, especially the white woman as mother,” and provides the novel with a marginally-happy ending.²⁰¹ Although Janet rejects her sister’s convenient recognition of kinship, she is unwilling to allow her nephew to die as a result. The partial-reconciliation in the interracial family presents some hope for the national racial reconciliation that Chesnutt presents as a possibility through the Carteret-Miller family drama. Knadler argues that it is in Janet’s role as mother, and the recognition of universal motherhood in the “black” woman that allow for this hope for reconciliation. He writes “to assure her son’s life, Olivia Carteret must recognize that the ideal type of womanhood . . . is embodied in her “dark”

²⁰⁰ Stephen P. Knadler, “Untragic Mulatto,” 441.

²⁰¹ Najmi, “Janet, Polly, and Olivia,” 15.

Other.”²⁰² This white recognition of the black potential for universality – along with an acknowledgement of the existing ties of interracial kinship in the United States – are presented as necessary steps toward racial equality in Chesnutt’s novel.

It was not such a universal claim to which Olivia appealed, however. We read that “This was the recognition for which, all her life, she had longed in secret . . . but it had come, not with frank kindness and sisterly love, but in a storm of blood and tears; not freely given, from an open heart, but exhorted from a reluctant conscience by the agony of a mother’s fears” (245). The novel may leave readers intent upon a narrative of race and reunion unsatisfied, in the absence of a reciprocal articulation of sisterhood between the “white” and “black” mothers of the text. While Elizabeth Ammons argues that *Iola Leroy* appeals to “a sisterhood of mothers,” the failure of biological sisterhood to produce satisfying emotional kinship ties frustrates this figurative sisterhood in *The Marrow of Tradition*.²⁰³ This sisterhood proves excessive in the text, as Olivia’s initial reluctance to acknowledge interracial kinship is coupled with Janet’s unwillingness to allow that kinship tie to be articulated solely for the benefit of a white future.

Just as Mammy Jane’s mammy-love is marked as insufficient to produce interracial kinship ties that will reflect upon the national family, Janet does not perform the role as loving sister to a white woman, but will best promote racial uplift in her role as a sort of surrogate-mother to a white child. As the “New Maternal Negro,” Knadler describes Janet as an “untragic” mulatto in her refusal “to renounce her white parentage or to be ashamed of her blackness.”²⁰⁴ Through her distance from the submission of the black “mammy,” but with the potential for

²⁰² Knadler, “Untragic Mulatto,” 437.

²⁰³ Elizabeth Ammons, Stowe’s Dream of the Mother-Savior: *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and American Women Writers Before the 1920s” in *New Essays on Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, ed. Eric Sundquist (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 176.

²⁰⁴ Knadler, “Untragic Mulatto,” 438, 443.

interracial kinship, Janet becomes a newly-raced figure, in line with Chesnutt's own dreams for racial uplift to be achieved by characters like Janet and Doctor Miller.

Although the novel's potential for racial reconciliation is rendered more possible because of an acknowledged kinship relation between blacks and whites, this possibility is deferred. Janet's care for her white sister's child in this moment can never compete with Mammy Jane's genuine love, and the sisterly affection that might accompany this act is tenuous. While the novel construes these kinship relations as literal, Chesnutt suggests a more general relation that rejects imagined barriers of racial dualism in the formation of an integrated national family – a family that is clearly not yet reconciled at the end of Chesnutt's novel.

Chesnutt's refusal of the fully-reconciled interracial family is a move that distinguishes *The Marrow of Tradition* from plantation nostalgia fiction. By showing a fraught interracial national family (though a family, in the biological sense) Chesnutt resists any impulse to place Janet into a role resembling the mammy figure. By prioritizing the importance of her own child's death, her begrudging refusal to let her sister's child die rejects the kinship her half-sister would now acknowledge (though only for the sake of her child, it seems) for a model of motherhood that does not necessitate biological kinship relations. Rather, it is her relation to her own child that drives her to help the Carteret baby and not her own biological ties to him. In this way, the white child is de-prioritized, even though he is the child who lives.

The extent of the problematic interracial kinship that Janet resists might be read in its contrast to the imagined "yearning" of Sarah Piatt's iconic mammy, which more closely resembles Mammy Jane's nostalgia. Janet Miller poses a poignant counter-narrative to the "mammy" trope in her presentation of a mixed-race woman who does not yearn for the white child of her mother's former-enslavers, but for her own child. The stakes of mammy-lore is clear

here, as kinship and servitude are conflated in the mammy figure and the accompanying black child is de-prioritized for the white one. The Miller's dead child, like Twain's "Tom Driscoll," shows the results of the white child's usurping powers. Chesnutt's novel paints a picture of interracial kinship ties as reluctant though necessarily biological in the history of the American nation. Moreover, he presents these ties as needing to be rejected – or at least checked – by the New Maternal Negro's refusal to prioritize the white child – and by extension, her refusal of an exclusively white national futurity.

Conclusion

“Diverse Bloods”: “White” Womanhood and Interracial National Kinship

They once thought they were a kind of family because together they had carved companionship out of isolation. But the family they imagined they had become was false. Whatever each one loved, sought or escaped, their futures were separate and anyone’s guess. One thing was certain, courage alone would not be enough. Minus bloodlines, he saw nothing yet on the horizon to unite them.

Toni Morrison, *A Mercy*, 155-156

Anxieties about interracial sexual mixture were already prominent in American national culture by the 1864 presidential election, when David Croly and George Wakeman’s pamphlet coining the term “miscegenation” was published.²⁰⁵ Although the pamphlet purported to endorse interracial sexual mixture, the term came quickly to carry the proscriptive weight that will characterize interracial unions in popular American discourse for at least another century.²⁰⁶ Croly and Wakeman’s pamphlet was, in fact, a hoax, produced by Democrats who hoped to sway the election against Lincoln by inciting racial fears of racial mixture. By appearing to advocate for interracial mixture, the publication played on already-established fears of racial mixture by not only arguing against racial inequality, but by claiming that “the miscegenetic or mixed races are much superior, mentally, physically, and morally, to those pure or unmixed.”²⁰⁷ Needless to say, those who would claim white supremacy felt the need to respond.

Croly and Wakeman’s proclamation, “The Blending of Diverse Bloods Essential to American Progress” purported to call for a re-thinking of America as an Anglo-Saxon nation,

²⁰⁵ See [Croly, David Goodman and George Wakeman]. *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and Negro*. New York: H. Dexter, Hamilton & Co., 1864.

²⁰⁶ Prior to 1864, the term most widely used to describe racial mixture was “amalgamation.” The term “commixture” was also introduced, but never became widely-used. See J. Crawford, “On the Commixture of the Races of Man as affecting the Progress of Civilization” *Anthropological Review*. 1.3 (London: Trübner & Company, 1863): 405-410. “Subgenation” was another term introduced as a response to “miscegenation.”

²⁰⁷ Croly and Wakeman, *Miscegenation*, 8-9.

and the creation of national homogeneity not by exclusion, but by amalgamation in the literal sense:

It is clear that no race can long endure without a commingling of its blood with that of other races. The condition of all human progress is miscegenation. The Anglo-Saxon should learn this in time for his own salvation. If we will not heed the demands of justice, let us, at least, respect the law of self-preservation. Providence has kindly placed on the American soil, for his own wise purposes, four millions of coloured people. They are our brothers, our sisters. By mingling with them we become powerful, prosperous, and progressive: by refusing to do so we become feeble, unhealthy, narrow-minded, unfit for the nobler offices of freedom, and certain of early decay.²⁰⁸

The pamphlet also predicts a future in which the duality of “white” and “black” races is eliminated, presenting complete racial mixture as imminent, as well as desirable. While this view of racial mixture is a parody of discourses on racial equality, it is not a far cry from the look toward racial mixture as an answer to the problem of seemingly un-reconcilable outlook on racial dualism that emerges post-Reconstruction. As Du Bois presents it, the color line is a problem, and some thinkers imagined its resolution not in the crossing of that line, but only in its erasure.

Alexis de Tocqueville suggested as much in his 1835 study on America, “As soon as it is agreed that whites and emancipated Negroes are placed upon the same land like two alien nations, it will not be difficult to understand that only two possibilities exist for the future: either Negroes and whites must blend together completely or they must part.”²⁰⁹ While the latter proposal of parting the two predominant American races was attempted in various ways, through the structures of plantation slavery, the project of colonization by which black people were “returned” to Africa, and the political segregation by which African Americans have been historically denied full citizenship and participation in the American nation, no complete “parting” of black and white people has never been accomplished in America. Perhaps because

²⁰⁸ Croly and Wakeman, *Miscegenation*, 24.

²⁰⁹ Alexis de Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. [1835] Trans. Gerald E. Bevan. (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 417.

of the impossibility of any such complete racial separation, racial mixture has been treated alternately as an inevitability and a “problem” in national discourse.

As historians such as Martha Hodes and Annette Gordon-Reed have shown, not only was complete racial separatism impossible by the nineteenth century, but whites were never fully separated from other races of people on the American continent. Clarence E. Walker suggests this in *Mongrel Nation: The America Begotten by Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings*, arguing that the United States was already racially-mixed even at its conception. Reading Jefferson and Hemings as more appropriate “founding parents of the North American Republic” than George and Martha Washington, Walker argues for reading of the nation as “a mixed-race society, not a white one.”²¹⁰ In order to fully-explore such a national narrative of racial mixture, participation in interracial kinship (and not just interracial sex) must be taken into consideration.

While much attention has been given to the preservation of national racial separatism with regard to laws about interracial marriage and the denial of citizenship to non-white people, the texts discussed here show alternative narratives which acknowledge the fact of racial mixture in nineteenth-century America. Moreover, such narratives position the white woman, usually understood as a preserver of white racial /national “purity,” as uniquely able to incorporate racial mixture into models of interracial family. In conclusion, I want to explore the implications for re-thinking the “white woman” as a cultural, literary figure, and especially as a national trope. Re-figuring the white woman with regard to her participation in interracial kinship relations ultimately re-figures her participation in the racialized nation.

Here, I will briefly examine the rhetoric of white womanhood in antebellum and Reconstruction era narratives of racial mixture and national kinship, reading the mixed-race

²¹⁰ Clarence E. Walker, *Mongrel Nation: The America Begotten by Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 2, 29.

heroine in narratives of race and national (re)union. As a character already positioned in interracial kinship relations, the mixed-race heroine has a different relation to interracial desire than assumedly-white models of racial “purity.” The racially-mixed characters I will discuss here re-position the figure of the “white” woman with relation to the nation, in the “polyglot” family (to use Lydia Maria Child’s term), and in already “amalgamated” American genealogies that work to define the nation. Namely, I present examples of the national “polyglot” family in the narratives of mixed-race heroines and racial (re)union of William Wells Brown’s 1853 novel, *Clotel* and Lydia Maria Child’s 1867 *A Romance of the Republic*. These texts work against national racial-purist ideologies of white womanhood that necessitate her rejection of the racial “Other,” as in Linda Kerber’s model of “republican motherhood” or Amy Kaplan’s theory of “manifest domesticity.” Rather, Brown’s and Child’s characters do not simply reproduce, but embody racial difference, indicating a shift towards a model of womanhood able to incorporate the Other into structures of national multiracial family.

Eve Allegra Raimon and Cassandra Jackson focus on the figure of the “tragic mulatta” as more complex than previous critiques of this figure allow, presenting fundamental connections between race and nation-building in narratives of the interracial family. As embodiments of racial “intermixture,” these scholars address the figure of the “tragic mulatta” as able to reveal truths not only about the state of the “interracial” nation, but about the nature of race, itself. I am interested less in the ways the “interracial” figure embodies national anxieties and realities about racial mixture than the ways these figures draw upon mythologies about whiteness, breaking down the point from which these literary figures have been previously examined. To this end, I do not mean to treat the figures I will discuss here as neatly falling within the “tragic mulatta” trope. Rather than focus on the trope of the “tragic mulatta,” I will focus on the trope

of the “white woman,” on which the sentimentalist rhetorics of “white slavery” depend, and through which attentions to white feminine purity and vulnerability, as well as the relationship between preserving white womanhood and national formation are articulated.

William Wells Brown’s abolitionist novel, *Clotel; or the President’s Daughter*, employs the familiar rhetoric of nineteenth-century anti-slavery literature, presenting slavery as hypocritical for the linked projects of American democracy and Christianity. At the center of his novel is a recasting of Lydia Maria Child’s story “The Quadroons” in the historical context of Thomas Jefferson’s sexual relationship with Sally Hemings. Brown’s novel gives a fictive account of the children produced by this union, writing the common trope of the “tragic mulatta” alongside Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence, both the progeny of our nation’s “founding fathers.” Using the rhetoric of white womanhood in his critique of slavery, Brown challenges racial categories as problematic for the racially-mixed nation he illustrates in *Clotel*, as many of the mixed-race women who are described and function as “white” in his narrative are (legally) slaves. To this effect, Brown has been most criticized for falling into the trap of using the mixed-race heroine to garner sympathy for the enslaved, based in the assumption that his white, middle-class, English audience will more easily sympathize with characters who are visually-white and who do not speak in dialect.

While most discussions of Brown’s novel focus on his title character, Georgiana, the white daughter of a Virginia slaveholder, differently embodies the figure of the white woman and through whom Brown’s novel might be read as differently embodying this trope. Georgiana serves as a model of white womanhood in her ability to fulfill a domestic role that has clear implications for the nation. Through her Christian critique of slavery, Georgiana serves her husband, Carlton, as “a lamp to his feet, and a light to his path,” the model of the abolitionist

woman.²¹¹ The effect of Georgiana's particular breed of Christian morality for the domestic is clear as her abolitionism re-frames the domestic space of the Southern plantation. By freeing her own slaves following her father's death, Georgiana attempts to make her home a model for the nation.

Significantly, Brown frames Georgiana's morality in the language of the *Declaration of Independence*. We read that

With respect to her philosophy – it was of a noble cast. It was, that all men are by nature equal; that they are wisely and justly endowed by the Creator with certain rights, which are irrefragable; and that, however human avarice may depress and debase, still God is the author of good to man – and of evil, man is the artificer to himself and to his species. (181)

Georgiana's nationalistic critique of slavery is accompanied by a critique of African colonization projects and an assertion of America as the rightful national "home" for slaves. Georgiana asks, "Why should they go to Africa, any more than the Free States or to Canada . . . Is this not their native land? What right have we, more than the negro, to the soil here, or to style ourselves native Americans? Indeed it is as much their homes as ours, and I have sometimes thought it was more theirs" (160). Georgiana cites the slave labor necessary for building the nation and negro participation in the revolutionary war as evidence for this claim to an American home.

In giving the primary abolitionist argument of the text to Georgiana, Brown centers his critique of slavery around a model of white womanhood. He correspondingly complicates this model, in his continual reference to the (apparent) whiteness of his mixed-race characters. Most interestingly, perhaps, he re-casts the trope of the "tragic mulatta" in terms of white womanhood. It is the president's *other* daughter, Althesa, who most clearly illustrates the potential slippage between the "tragic mulatta" and "white woman" tropes. Though both are legally defined as

²¹¹ William Wells Brown. *Clotel; Or, The President's Daughter*. Ed. Robert S. Levine. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000. Future references to this text will be given parenthetically.

“quadroons” the two women meet decidedly different fates. Clotel’s narrative is familiar: She is abandoned by her white lover, Horatio Green. Since their union has been defined as illegal, Horatio is free to marry a white woman, leaving Clotel alone with their illegitimate child. Unsurprisingly, Clotel’s narrative ends in her suicide.

Althesa, however, is bought out of slavery by her ever-faithful beloved, the white, northern-born Henry Morton. They live comfortably together as a married couple (though illegally, under southern anti-amalgamation law) until their deaths. While Clotel’s story is a clear retelling of the “tragic mulatta” trope, Althesa’s draws upon the sympathy of Brown’s white readers by allowing her to function as a white woman throughout much of the novel. Raimon gives attention to Brown’s description of Clotel in *The “Tragic Mulatta” Revisited*, holding that “the women [in Brown’s narrative] are portrayed as exotic, sexually available, and aristocratic all at once” (74). There is nothing exotic about Brown’s description of Althesa, however. Although Raimon acknowledges the limitations of critiques that “focus on the mulatta’s approximation to white standards of beauty and bearing” (74), Brown employs whiteness differently with regard to Althesa. The rhetorical function of Althesa in Brown’s narrative depends upon notions of white womanhood that are inscribed both in white feminine beauty and the domestic role of the middle-class white woman. In Althesa’s story, Brown twists the tragic element, resisting the “tragic mulatta” trope as Althesa successfully passes for white.

Brown’s employment of white feminine beauty in Althesa’s narrative is visible in his scene depicting Henry Morton’s initial reaction to Althesa, who has just been purchased by James Crawford. Brown narrates,

In his own mountain home he had been taught that the slaves of the Southern states were Negroes, if not from the coast of Africa, the descendants of those who had been imported. He was unprepared to behold with composure a beautiful young white girl of fifteen in the degraded position of a chattel slave. The blood chilled in his young heart as he heard

Crawford tell how, by bantering with the trader, he had bought her for two hundred dollars less than he first asked. (98)

Importantly, Henry feels not only a detached sense of pity for Althesa, but also an affinity that compels him to become personally responsible for obtaining her freedom. He initially identifies with Althesa not as a Negro slave, but as “a beautiful young white girl,” but his call to sympathy is given not despite, but because of her position of legal blackness. We quickly learn that “the young man’s sympathy ripened into love, which was reciprocated by the friendless and injured child of sorrow. There was but one course left; that was, to purchase the young girl and make her his wife, which he did six months after her arrival in Crawford’s family” (99). Here, Brown works with the particular irony of the “white” slave, as his readers are asked to sympathize with young Henry Morton’s shock. Further, in Brown’s world, slaves do not just elicit sympathy from whites; they enter into white society and engage in romantic relationships with his white characters. Whatever the fates of Brown’s mixed-race figures (which vary over the different editions of his novel), the presentation of mixed-race heroines both alongside and as models of white womanhood challenges racial essentialism, and exposes the trope as constructed by notions of nationally-construed racial separatism which conflict with national realities of interracial kinship.

The rhetoric of white womanhood is at play in discussions of racial mixture, particularly in sentimental fiction and in the abolitionist press in writing about “white” female characters, such as Child’s Mary Conant in *Hobomok* and Stowe’s Eva St. Claire, who serve as precursors which inform the presentation of mixed-race women characters like Child’s Rosalie and Xarifa in “The Quadroons,” Brown’s *Clotel* and Althesa, and Stowe’s Eliza. The rhetorics of white womanhood at work in these texts are employed not merely to marginalize mixed-race figures, but work to re-figure the bounds by which race is understood in ways that challenge not just the

nature of an essentialist understanding of race, but which expose the trope of “white womanhood” as national myth.

As in my previous chapters, I do not aim to essentialize racial mixture in my discussion here, but to highlight the ways these characters are able to employ an existing national rhetoric of white womanhood in their simultaneous embodiment of (visible) whiteness in their representations and their performance of versions of white womanhood that sometimes reinforce and sometimes challenge the dominant trope. It is not the liminality of these mixed-race figures that allows for their often shifting performances of white womanhood, but the nature of the figure of the “white woman,” itself, which never allows itself to be fully-performed, either by them or by their accompanying “white” women characters like Georgiana.

While Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) ends with the emigration of the mixed-race couple to Liberia, leaving Eliza and her family no place in American national formation, Mary and George of Brown’s first edition of *Clotel* (1853) similarly remain in emancipated England, never to return to the United States. The 1867 edition of *Clotelle* however, ends with the return of the young couple, hopeful for the outcome of the war. Similarly, Lydia Maria Child’s *A Romance of the Republic* (published the same year) ends with a happy interracial “polyglot” family represented as a microcosm of the post-war national family. Just as Brown orients his novel to American history by representing his heroine through her relation to the third president of the United States, Child frames her “romance” in national terms, staging her revision of the “tragic mulatta” narrative in the landscape of Civil War drama.

Like other “tragic mulatta” heroines both before and after them, Flora and Rosa only learn of their mixed-race heritage following their father’s death. Their parents’ marriage, because of their enslaved mother’s status, was not legitimate and impending debt (of course)

causes the daughters to be sold with the rest of their late father's "property." After an appropriately sensational series of events, Flora and Rosa (who do not die) marry white men who are fully aware of their African ancestry. Both women's husbands and Flora's adult son fight in the Civil War, surviving to return to their happy family, which does not hide the fact of their African American ancestry, but embraces it alongside other, European origins, all of which are ultimately assimilated into a model of the American "polyglot" family.

As characters like Stowe's Eliza and Brown's Althesa seem to enter the possibility of participating in an American family only by virtue of the extent to which they perform white womanhood, Child's Rosa and Flora seem to find a place in the inherently-mixed national family by virtue of their racial mixture in both body and through marriage and reproduction. Rather than working to keep out the threat of the racial "Other," as in Kaplan's presentation of Republican Motherhood, these figures, in their embodiment of racial difference, also serve to bring racial differences into communion in the body of the national family.²¹² Despite all of this, *A Romance of the Republic* falls short of racial inclusivity. Though sympathetic abolitionists, Rosa and Flora do not, themselves, easily identify with non-white women. And the novel's version of American assimilation has requirements of class and education, as African American characters who are not known to be mixed-race, or those who were raised enslaved and thereby denied opportunities of education and culture, are unable to fully participate in this model of American family without further "refinement."

In this failing, Child's novel reveals the workings of white womanhood, and especially the central position of the "white woman," in these characters' pivotal role in incorporating difference into the "polyglot" national family. Unlike the mixed-race heroines of abolitionist

²¹² For a discussion of how the national story of the family also implicates women in issues of violence via their marriage and reproduction, see Shirley Samuels "Women, Blood, and Contract" *American Literary History* 20.1-2 (Spring/Summer 2008): 57-75.

literature, whose whiteness functions as a pivot in its ability to garner sympathy only by virtue of the irony of enslaved, visually-white, bodies, Flora and Rosa function in the text not in spite of their mixed-race, but because of it. Moreover, these mixed-race heroines take the place of white heroines in this text, as Child presents these women as uniquely positioned, following the Civil War's devastation, to reproduce the nation. What Child produces through these characters is a differently-white version of Republican Motherhood.

Rather than simply reproductive, however, these women's role is absorptive in nature, as they are able to draw together various points of difference not because their whiteness is essential or permanent, but because it is malleable. These positionings of white womanhood centralize the connections between race and nation in these texts. If Amy Kaplan is correct in presenting the white woman at the center of the national formation, with the domestic sphere figured as a microcosm of the nation, then this raced and gendered icon is at the center of these novels. As literary and cultural depictions of white womanhood involved in interracial kinship relations shift expectations about race and kinship while inflecting upon popular understandings of literary genre and reading practices, the centrality of the figure of the white woman cannot be overlooked.

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